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ADVENTURE

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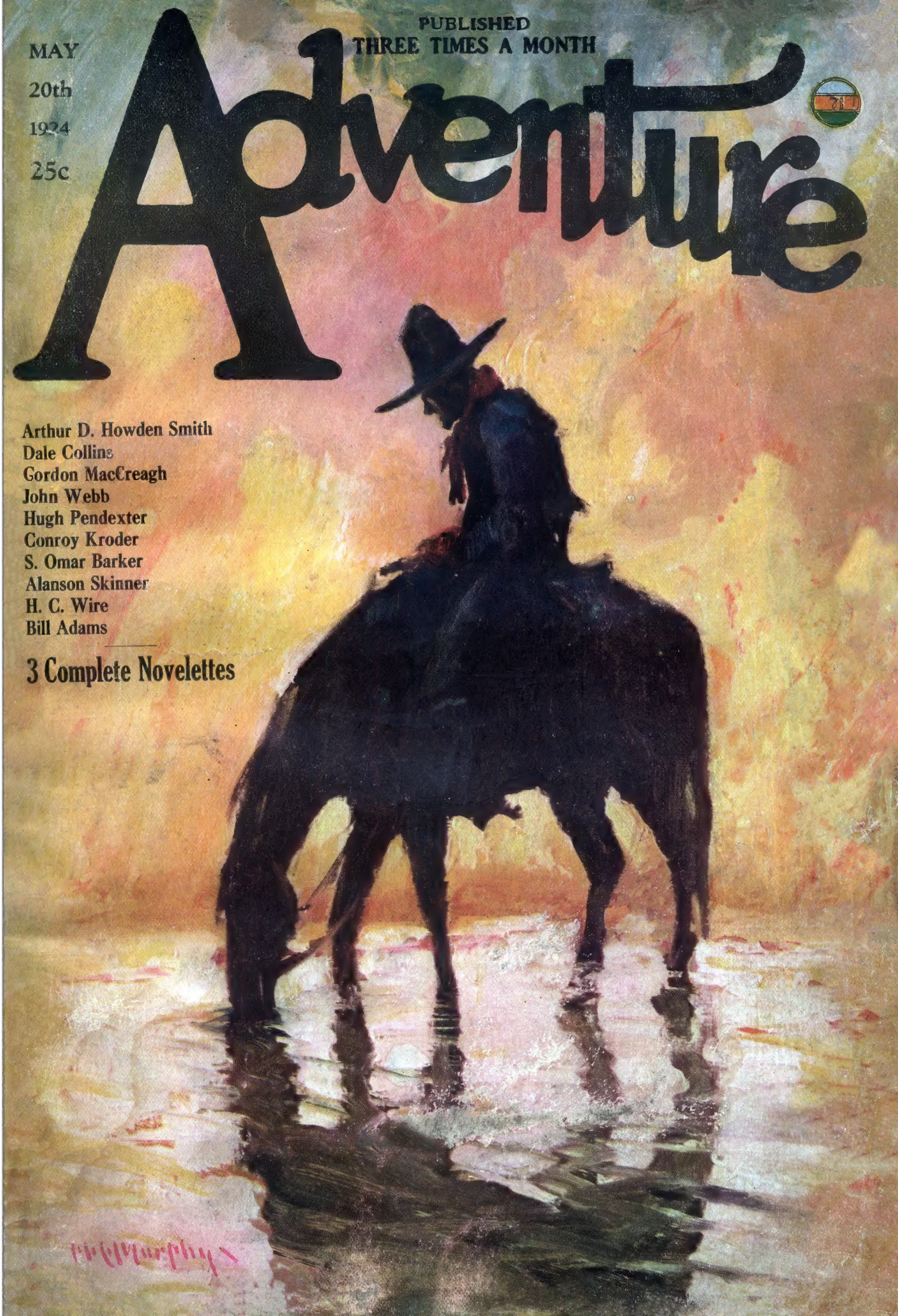
Adventure



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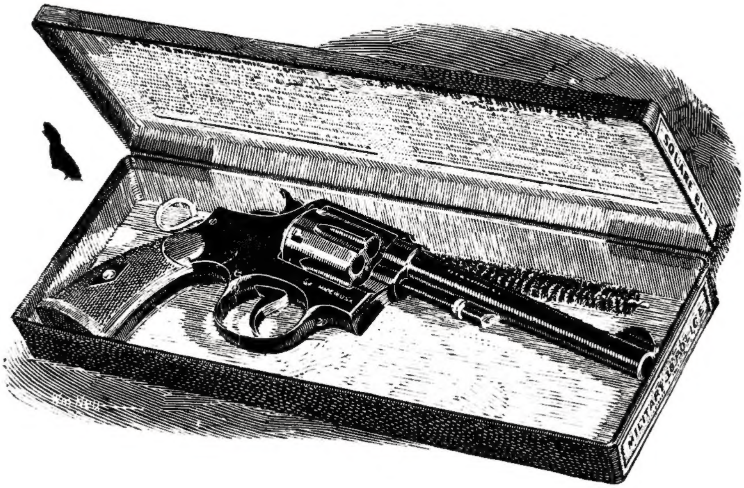

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Volume 46
Number 5

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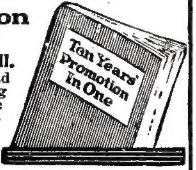
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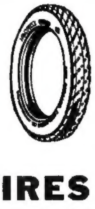

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Vol·XLVI·No·5

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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*Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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One New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

IT WAS a neat uppercut to another man's chin that was young *McLeod's* note of introduction to *Dan Wheeler;* and then the two formed a partnership to solve the mystery of "Sucksand Pond." "NECKLACES AND DAN WHEELER," a four-part story by John I. Cochrane, begins in the next issue.

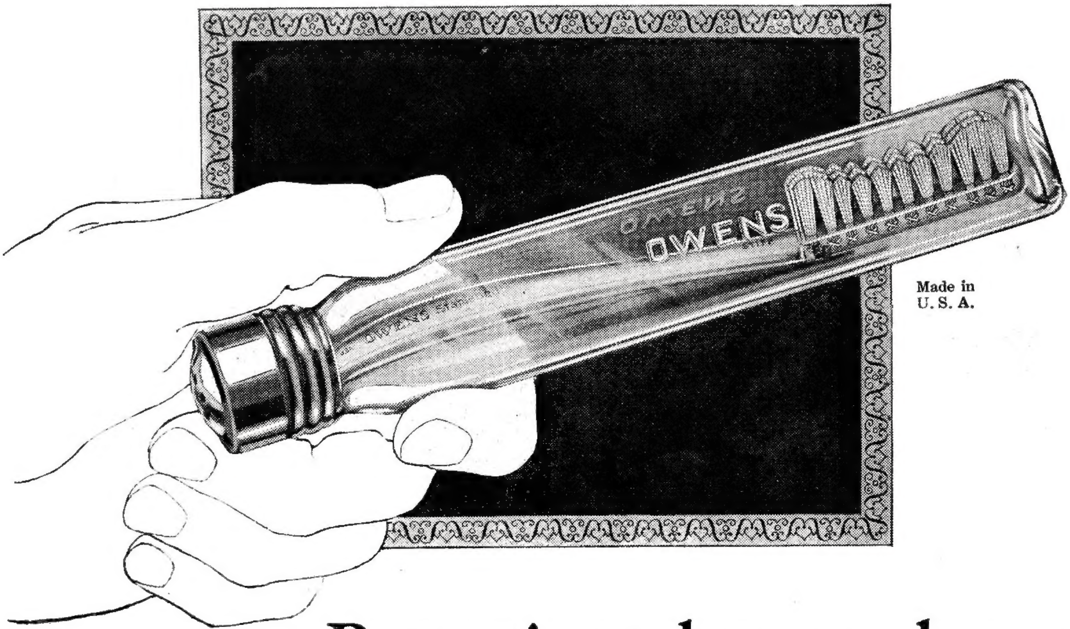
PELLER had no liking for the mission that sent him into Togoland. But then he had had such missions before. Into a land of German intrigue he went with *Samake*, *Bo Diare* and *Yatera*—his three native *tirailleurs*. "WHEN THE SUN SAT DOWN," a complete novelette of Africa, by Georges Surdez, in the next issue.

SIR SILVAIN prayed for noble ventures and happy fortune. The boy *King Charles* gave him a chance for them. "THE CHILD'S HONOR," a complete novelette of France in the Middle Ages, by H. C. Bailey, in the next issue.

THERE were three passengers on the steamer *Maori Chief*, and concealed somewhere in the steamer was a large amount of money. With one man suspected by the police and the others plotting together, the captain had a fateful voyage. "THREE PASSENGERS FOR LANTU-VANNA," a complete novelette by Frederick Moore, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



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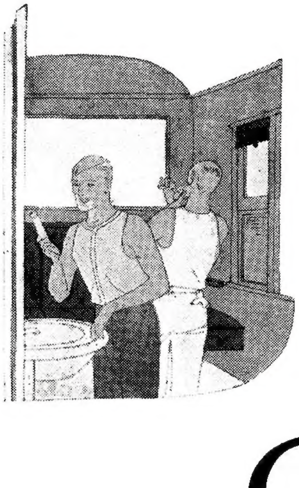

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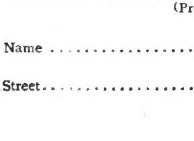

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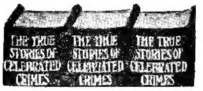
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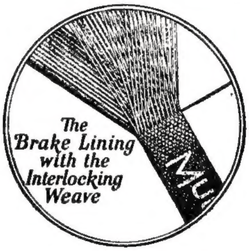
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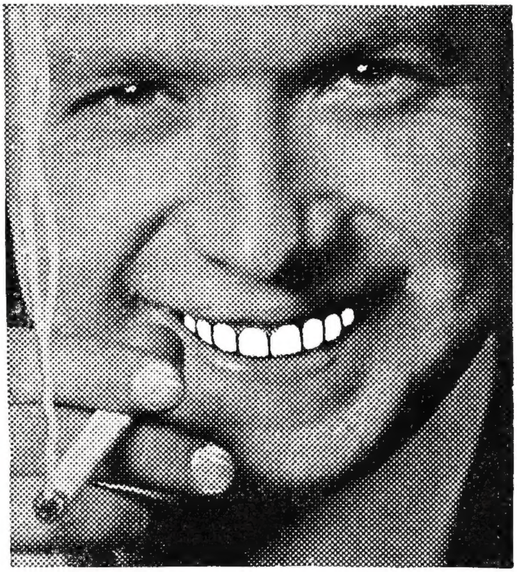

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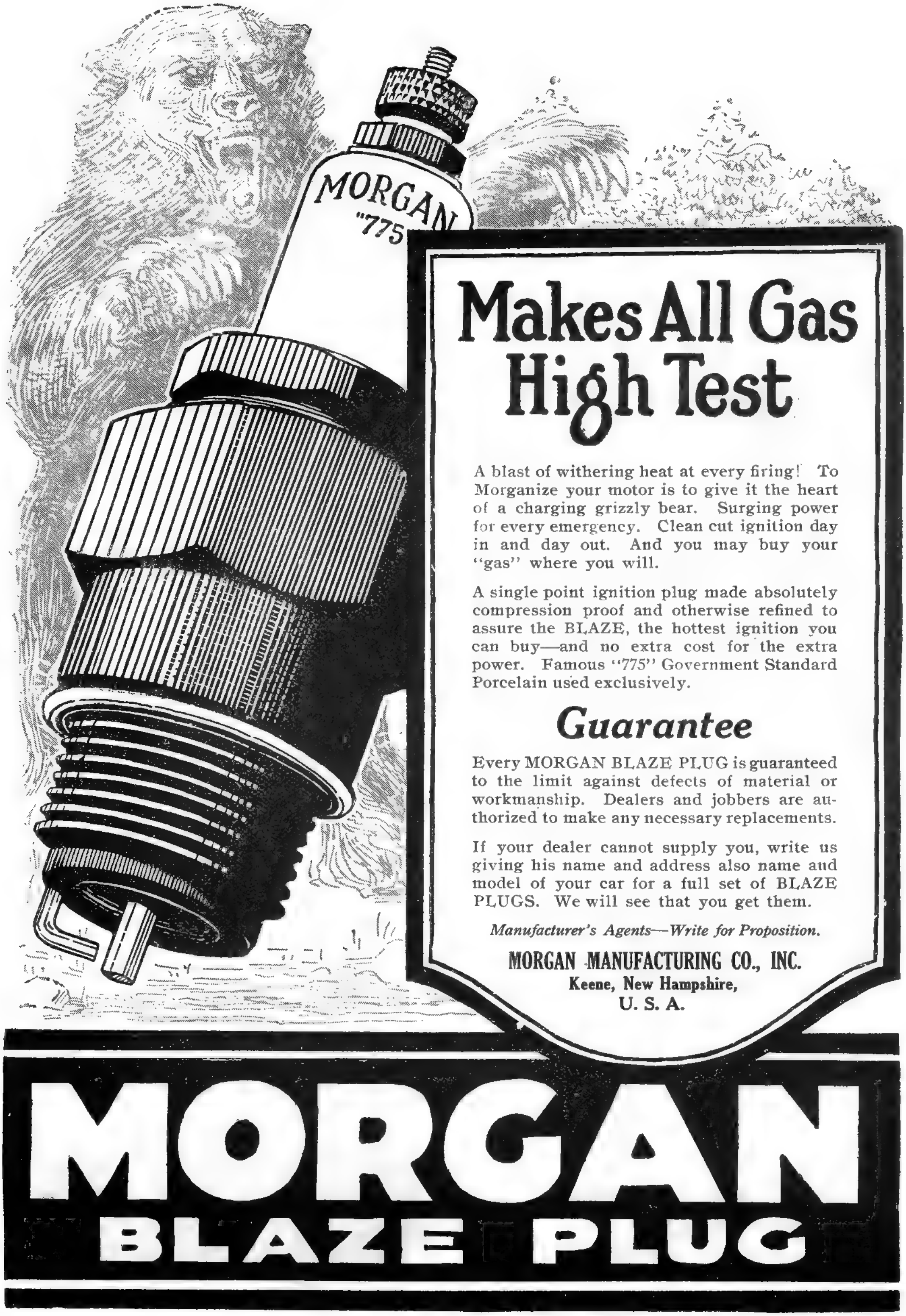

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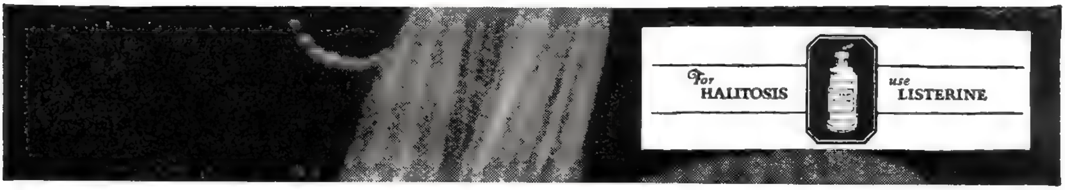

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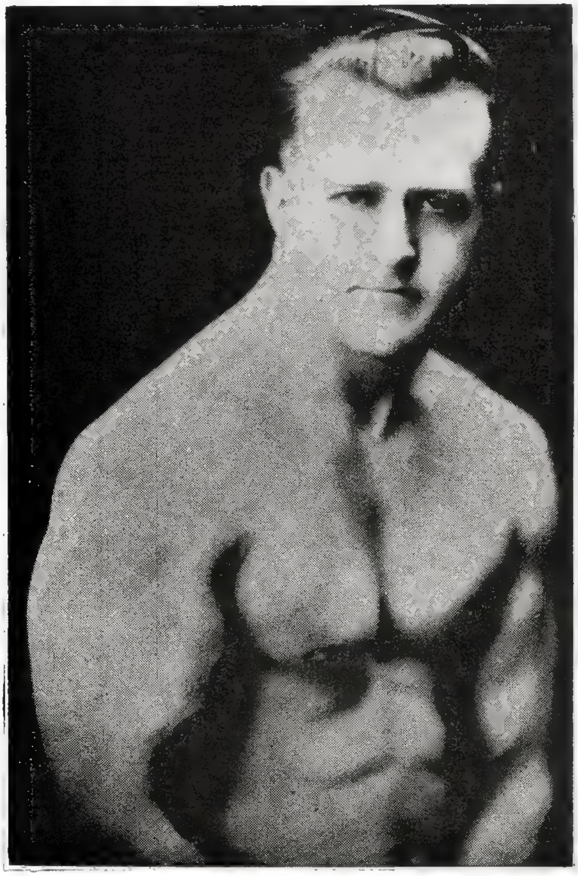

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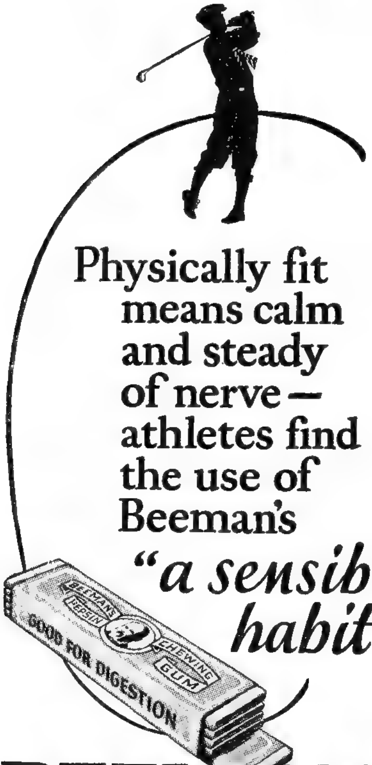

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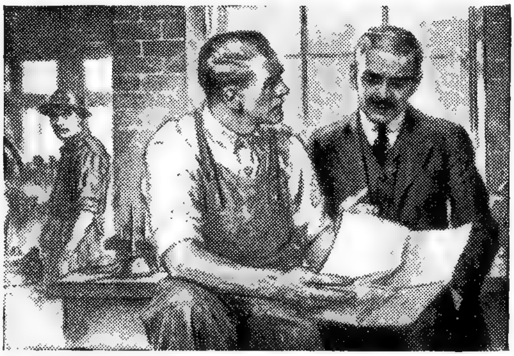

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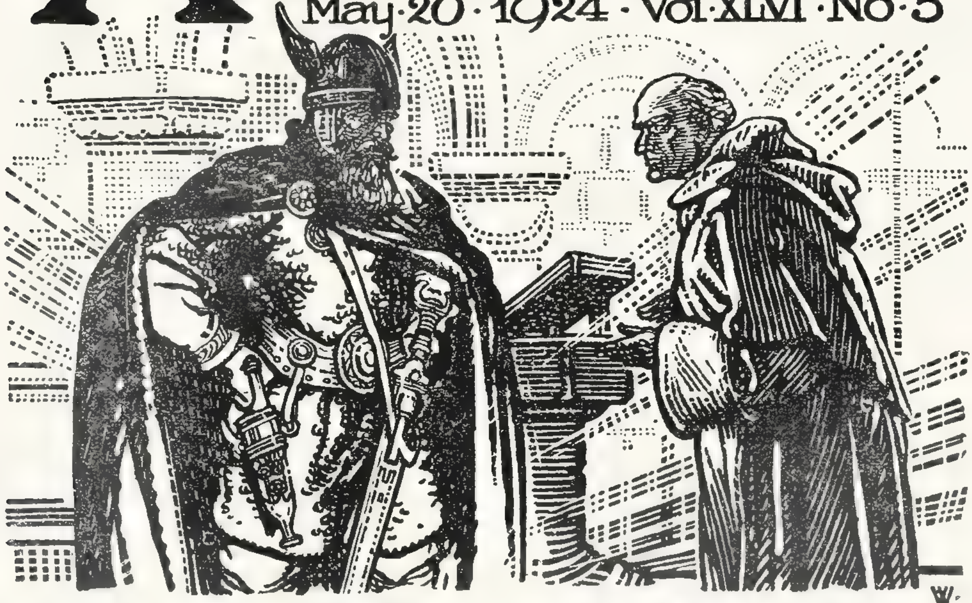

SWAIN'S HONOR

A Complete Novelette by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Swain's Justice," "Porto Bello Gold," etc.

SWAIN frowned down from his saddle at the man who barred his way into the stead yard.

"It is your meaning, then, Hakon Klo, that you deny me as your lord and refuse to pay me rent for the lands of Borgadale?" he demanded.

The house-carls at his back copied the frown and tightened their clasps upon their weapons, but the man on the ground refused to be intimidated. He was a squat, thick-chested fellow, with deep-set, sullen eyes and an iron hook strapped upon the wrist where his right hand should have been. It was this peculiarity which had won for him his nickname of Klo, or Claw.

"Why, as to that, Swain, there is more to be said than has come from your tongue," he replied. "Hroald Havard's son has taken rent and scat from me since Jarl Paul outlawed you, and it is from him——"

Swain leaned closer toward the man, and his blue eyes sparkled with a fury that was shown by the very repression of his speech.

"Yes, yes, all this is true," he interrupted. "Jarl Paul outlawed me to please my enemies, and because I must leave the Orkneyar and my father was just dead at the hands of Witch Frakork and her ill grandson, Olvir Rosta, those same enemies prevailed upon the Jarl to grant them my lands in Caithness. All this I know well, Hakon. I have thought upon it long nights during my exile. I have been at pains to remember the names of those who

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misused me. Some of them already have felt my wrath. Others— But this talk is to no purpose. Do you own me for lord and pay your rent?"

Hakon Klo cast a wary eye at the two-score mailed vikings in the road.

"If you bring hither the half of a dragon's crew, what can I do?" he grumbled.

"You can pay your rent," rejoined Swain.

"And what shall I say to Hroald when he comes for his?" retorted Hakon. "Must I pay two rents?"

"If you do, you are a fool, which I do not hold you to be," said Swain. "Hroald has no more right to your rents than a Daneland rover. My father——"

"So you say," cried Hakon Klo. "But Hroald's son, Gutorm, is wedded to my wife's sister, and he tells me that your father never had certain right and title to Borgadale—unless it was by sword——"

"And since when did you possess a knowledge of the feudal rights and possessions in the Orkneyar, Hakon?" inquired Swain gently. "Have you dwelt in our midst so long?"

For the first time the farmer shuffled his feet in the dust, nonplussed for an answer.

"If I came here seven Winters ago out of Sweden, is that a reason to mock at me or question my honesty?" he protested. "I have dwelt here kindly toward all and paid my just rents and dues, nor accumulated feuds or manbote judgments—as have others."

This last was shot out with a kind of venomous hiss, and Swain's big white teeth grinned through the red tangle of his beard.

"I see that you are not without knowledge of the doings and customs of our Orkney folk," he answered, still gently. "But while I have not heard of your participating in one of our feuds, there is a story which came to my ears that you left Sweden in greater haste than comfort, and with the guilt of a foul killing harrassing your steps."

"A lie!" exclaimed Hakon Klo.

Swain's hand seemed to float to his sword-hilt.

"A lie?" he queried.

"That was told to you, Swain," amended the farmer hastily. "You have suffered enough injustice, yourself, to know how easily a false tale can be reckoned against the most honest man."

"There I find myself in agreement with you," returned Swain. "However, Hakon, we are yet talking in circles. I came hither for my rent, and my rent I have not got."

Hakon threw up his hands in a gesture of protest, and the polished curve of the steel hook on his right wrist shone in the sunlight with a kind of ugly menace.

"But whatever I pay you, that will Hroald of Vik demand from me, likewise! Is it just that a poor man should be ground between two rich ones!"

"It is not," agreed Swain promptly. "And I will make it my business to see that Hroald does not bother you. These lands of Borgadale came to my father's grandfather in the days when the two Jarls Paul and Erlend ruled jointly in the islands. My family have possessed them ever since, and I do not intend to allow Hroald of Vik or any other man to hold them to my despite. As for you, pay me my rent of eight silver merks and send me ten men armed and *boun** to sail in my longships when I go viking-faring, and you shall enjoy them in peace and safety."

Hakon looked desperately around him, first, at the snug buildings of his stead and the fields he had improved during his seven years' tenancy; next, at the mailed men with Swain; last of all, over the rolling hills toward the seacoast where lay the village and stead of Vik, home of Hroald Havard's son. The buildings, his wits warned him, could be burned as easily as others, the fields could be cropped by another man; Swain's men were present; Hroald's were not. What could he do?

"It is not just!" he wailed. "You will make a feud between me and Hroald, whose son Gutorm——"

"Married your wife's sister," said Swain. "You had already told us so. Do not concern yourself about Hroald. I have promised Jarl Rognvald that I will not quarrel with any chiefs, but will take all my disputes to him for judging. Otherwise, I should make short work of Hroald. As it is, if he does not like it that I take back from him property which never was his, he can go to the Jarl at Orphir and ask a judgment against me. I shall be blithe to answer him there."

"Then let me refuse to pay the rent and carry my case to Jarl Rognvald," suggested Hakon Klo.

"Ah, no," denied Swain. "You are not a chief, Hakon, you are only a tenant, and a rebellious tenant may be slain by any chief for cause given. At the worst, the Jarl might judge that I should pay man-bote to your family."

---

*Equipped.

Once more the white teeth gleamed through the ruddy beard, and the frosty blue eyes glittered like sword-blades.

"I could win all the man-bote that the Jarl would judge against me on a single viking cruise," he added.

Hakon shuddered, but a savage look of cowed belligerence dawned in his own eyes that were buried beneath the buttresses of hairy, beetling brows.

"I do not doubt that," he said. "Well, I will pay the rent. But I cannot pay it now or all at once. You must give me time."

"I am a reasonable man," answered Swain. "You shall have all the time you require in reason. I go now to my lands on Gairsey in the Islands, but my steward in Caithness will call upon you. Ho, Margad, stand forth!"

An immense giant of a man strode out from the group of house-carls. He was a head taller than Swain, who, himself, was taller than most men, and as thick in the shoulders and chest as Hakon Klo. His great neck rose, uncurved, in a pillar to join the huge, round ball of his skull. His little eyes blinked with the stark ferocity of the single-minded.

"Since you have lived only seven years in the Orkneyar, Hakon, you may not know Margad, Grim's son," remarked Swain politely. "He has been my friend since we were boys; he shared my outlawry and my viking fortunes. I trust him as I would my brother, and now that I must journey to Gairsey and set my property there in order, I leave him at Dungelsbae to administer my lands in Caithness. He speaks for me. What he asks, you shall grant him, or risk my displeasure."

Margad nodded with a kind of pleased pride, much like a little boy who has been singled out by one of a number of warriors to show his skill at spear-casting. But Hakon Klo only groaned dismally.

"Either way I see troubles ahead of me," he complained. "If I do not pay you what you seek, you will destroy me. If I do Hroald will turn my enemy."

"Then shall I be your friend," Swain assured him. "Be of good cheer. Presently, I shall bring a lawsuit against Hroald at Orphir and we will have Jarl Rognvald throw out his claim. In the meantime, do what Margad bids you, pay him a merk of silver this day week, a second merk the second week ——"

"I shall be ruined!" cried Hakon.

"Not at all," denied Swain. "Two merks in two weeks to show that you mean business. Then we will give you a month each for the other six merks. You are fortunate, man. I have said nothing to you of the rents you have been paying Hroald since my father's death, for I shall ask them of Hroald. But if you are not satisfied ——"

"I am satisfied," declared Hakon. But his voice was not that of a satisfied man or one who looks with pleasure toward the future. " 'If the wolf takes the lamb, shall not the sheep be satisfied?' So the saying goes, and there is truth in it."

"Perhaps you are right," agreed Swain, turning his horse's head. "But it is a sorry day for the sheep that the wolf comes a second time."

II

SWAIN rode from Borgadale to Dungelsbae, where he dismissed the majority of his followers and gave final instructions to Margad.

"I am none too sure of this fellow, Hakon Klo," he said. "My father gave him tenancy of Borgadale seven years gone, I remember, because the farm was remote and our folk were not inclined to occupy it. Also, there was some dispute with Hroald of Vik, but touching that you need not worry, for I know that in the old days men took small account of it, as they did of Hroald and all his family. At any rate, Hakon Klo was settled at Vik and, although he was slow in his rent, he grew fair crops and nourished cattle. But since I was at feud with Jarl Paul, after my father's killing, he made this marriage of his wife's sister with Gutorm Hroald's son and it is evident his pride has grown apace. It is plainly to be seen that he is all for Hroald's side in the dispute as to the ownership of the land. But we shall soon make that right.

"The best way to settle a claim is to slay the claimant, Swain," said Margad in his slow, squeaky voice—a boy's voice in a giant's body.

"It is sometimes so," admitted Swain, "but not in this case. I must walk warily not to offend the Jarl, for I have enemies who never tire of telling him how quarrelsome I am. Let me give them an opportunity, and they will be swift to prick him up to killing me as a danger to the Orkney-folk."

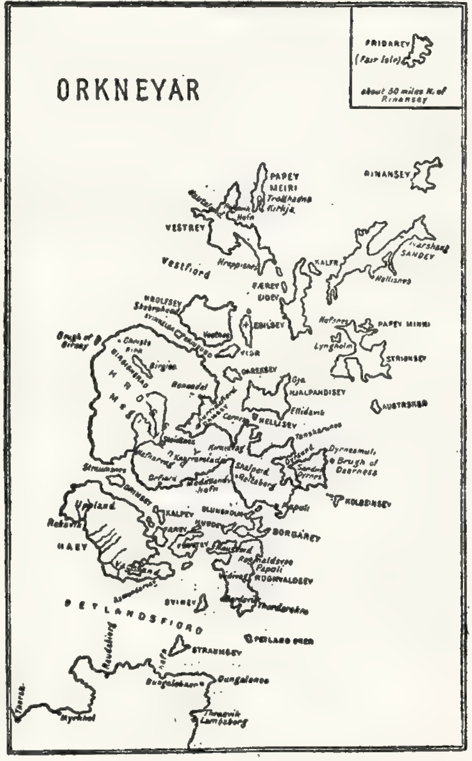
"It will go ill with the Jarl or any other who attempts to harm you, Swain," replied Margad. "We Caithness-folk will stand to them."

"I doubt it not," answered Swain, "but by your leave, I will not put the issue to the test. Walk warily, as I have said. Watch Hakon and hold him to his agreement, and do not fail to let me know if anything goes wrong. A wise action is often better than a hasty blow."

Margad swelled out his immense chest and clutched at his sword-hilt, for he was immensely vain of the confidence Swain had in him. He was one of those strong men of little natural wit who serve unhesitatingly any leader they hold in affection. He and Swain had grown up together, fished, hunted and swum in company as boys; fought their first battles, shoulder to shoulder, as young warriors; shared the same sleeping-bag on the wave-swept bottom-boards of an outlawed longship. For Swain he was ready to die or to live, according to Swain's wish. And it was because Swain knew him to be entirely faithful, that he entrusted him with the stewardship of the Caithness lands which Jarl Rognvald had returned to Swain as a reward for Swain's efforts in aiding in the winning of the jarldom.

These were tense days in the Orkneys. Red battle and bloody feud had taken their toll of men, sapped loyalties, riven families, driven hundreds into outlawry. Jarl Rognvald, new come to his seat of power, jealous of the dominant influence of Swain with the younger warriors, was feeling cautiously for a policy which would cement the allegiance of his unruly feudatories. Secret friends of the chiefs who had lately fallen or been driven into exile were intriguing against those who had contributed to the banishment of Jarl Paul and the flight of Frakork the Witch—that monstrous parody of Norse womanhood, whose sinister influence had been exerted throughout three generations of Jarls and chiefs—and her grandson, Olvir Rosta, or the Roysterer, who had come by his title during a short life of unscrupulous violence.

Aside from all these agencies stood the Church, represented by Bishop William, himself a former warrior and viking-farer, who knew the hearts and passions of his fierce flock and cherished the prestige of those who followed the lead of Swain, his cousin on the distaff side. A wily old priest, Father William, with a brain that saw under and over and through the plottings and deceptions that baffled most of those who were in the center of the shifting web of conflict. Some thought of him was in Swain's mind as he adjured Margad to walk warily, for Swain, direct in speech, planned to achieve his ends as the Bishop did, by indirect methods and subtle strokes veiled in mystery. But Margad, infinitely simple, never followed his chief beyond the more obvious purport of the spoken word.


ORKNEYAR
FRIDAREY
(Fair Isle)
about 50 miles N. of Rinansey
RINANSEY
PAPEY MEIRI
Trollhadna Kirkja
Hofn
VESTREY
Vestfiord
Hreppisnes
KALFR
Rvarshaug
SANDEY
Hellisnes
FÆREY
EGEY
HROLFSEY
EGILSEY
Hofsnes
PAPEY MINNI
Lyngholm
Brugh of Birsay
Birgisa
VIGR
STRJONSEY
Renadal
DAREKSEY
Gja
HJALPANDISEY
Ellidavik
AUSTRSKER
HROSSEY
HELLISEY
Tanskarunes
Dyrnesmuli
Brugh of Dyrness
Strumnes
Skalpard
Orfiara
Rolsaborg
KOLBEINSEY
Upland
KALFEY
Papoli
Rekavik
BORGAREY
HAEY
Rognvaldsvoe
Papoli
ROGNVALDSEY
SVINEY
Thordarsker
PETLANDSFIORD
PETLANDS SKER
STRAUMSEY
Raudabiorg
Dungalsbaer
Dungalsnes
Thorsa
Myrkhol
Thrasvik
Lambaborg

"I shall hold Hakon to his agreement," he promised. "No Swedelander can frighten me with a clawed hand."

At Dungelsbae Swain took ship across the Pentland Firth to Orphir on Horssey, where Jarl Rognvald dwelt, and he tramped into the Jarl's *skalli* an hour or two before the candle-lighting, with the sea-brine white on his mail-shirt and helmet.

Jarl Rognvald was sitting at the ale-drinking with a dozen of his Norse chieftains and the *boendr** of the Islands who were most intimate with him. A large man, open and frank of face, easily led, inclined to sudden enthusiasms and quick wraths, the Jarl was already widely liked; but his very popularity and suppleness to flattery rendered him uncertain: He was prone to follow the last counsel that trickled into his ear, and he was become frankly suspicious of Swain, both because of the poisoned hints that were tossed to him from many quarters and because of his own knowledge of the extent of his obligations to Swain for aid in establishing himself in the Islands.

"Greetings, Swain," he said now. "I had not heard you were coming this way."

"I am on my way to Gairsey, Lord Jarl," answered Swain, "and I stopped in passing to pay my respects."

This was flattery from Swain, and Jarl Rognvald was human enough to enjoy it.

"That is well thought of, Swain," he said. "There is always a seat at the high table for you in Orphir."

"And why not?" commented Swain roughly. "There are many who say pretty things to you, Jarl Rognvald, but do they serve you as diligently as Swain Olaf's son?"

The Jarl frowned.

"That harsh tongue of your's will get you into trouble," he rasped.

"It has," retorted Swain evenly. "And my wits have plucked me forth in safety."

"Once your tongue will carry you too far," fumed the Jarl.

"I will chance it," said Swain. "What's news with you, Lord Jarl?"

"None," returned the Jarl shortly. "Ho, varlets, a place for Swain Olaf's son."

But Swain shook his head.

"I must be on my way to Gairsey. By your leave, I will not tarry."

"As you please," said the Jarl, thoroughly offended.

"But before I go," continued Swain, "there is one word I would say to you, Lord Jarl."

"Say it," said the Jarl, his ill-temper unconcealed.

"Hroald Havard's son, who dwells at Hroald's Vik on the east coast of Caithness, has set up a claim to the lands of Borgadale, which my family have held since Jarl Paul and Jarl Erlend together ruled in the Orkneyar, and the tenant of the lands, Hakon Klo, has disputed my right to his rents."

"What of it?" snarled the Jarl.

"Only that I seek justice of you in the case," replied Swain carelessly. "You have said you would not have the chiefs quarreling——"

"If you start a feud over the rights to a single farm you shall feel the pressure of my hand, no matter who you may be," threatened the Jarl.

"That is what I am trying not to do. I might have slain Hakon and given his stead to one of my house-carls; but rather than that, I have come to present the facts to you."

"I will judge them," said the Jarl brusquely. "When Hroald sets up his counter-claim officially, then do you sue out a case with me and I will judge between you, according to the facts.

"A delayed case is an invitation to trouble, Lord Jarl," said Swain.

"I cannot judge until the other claimant is present," returned Jarl Rognvald.

Swain glanced around the hall.

"There are Haflidi Thorkel's son and Dufnial of Swiney, and I see Blan Jon's son, too. All of them know well that until my father's death and my outlawry no men took Hroald's claim seriously."

Of the three men only Dufnial was willing to risk the warning contained in the scowl upon the Jarl's face.

"It is the truth, Lord Jarl," spoke up Dufnial. "There was a claim that ran back to the old times, but it was judged by Jarl Erlend, Thorfinn's son, in favor of Swain's family."

"That was a long time ago," answered the Jarl. "If there is any doubt in the case it had better be judged again."

Swain hesitated a moment.

"So be it, Lord Jarl," he said then. "I go to Gairsey, and if trouble comes I shall be there."

Jarl Rognvald nodded his head without speaking, and Swain turned upon his heel and walked out of the *skalli*. He was about to leave the village to follow the path across the island to the Aurrida Firth, which separated Hrossey from Gairsey, when he spied lights in the church on the hillside and accosted a passing villager to ask him what was toward at that hour.

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*Landholders, gentry.

"It is Bishop William," replied the man. "He has come to say masses for Gunnar the Priest, who is dead."

"A dead man may still do me a favor," remarked Swain to himself, and he thanked the villager and abandoned the path to climb to the church door.

Inside the little stone building he doffed his helmet and peered around without much curiosity. He was a Christian of sorts, with private partiality for the Old Gods, but in his wanderings he had seen many of the great churches of Frankland and other parts of southern Europe, and this tiny Norse edifice seemed insignificantly humble by comparison.

It was practically deserted, save for half a dozen women and two priests who attended the bishop, and the mere sight of a man in armor was enough to catch Father William's eye.

With a whispered word in the ear of a priest, he descended from the miniature altar and strode to Swain's side, his lean body swaggering beneath the stiffly rattling vestments as it had been wont to do on many a bitterly-fought deck when the longships crashed, and the arrow-hail split the air, or shield-walls thundered to the swinging steel.

"What brings you to this unfamiliar ground, Swain?" he whispered, his old eyes alight with war-fire.

"What brings you to mumbling words over a doddering graybeard who never struck a blow in his life?" parried Swain.

"What you would never understand, Swain."

"Perhaps," admitted Swain, "and for that matter, I want no understanding of it. Anything which would drive as good a swordsman as you from the weapon-muster is too close to black magic for me."

Bishop William crossed himself.

"Enough, enough," he adjured. "What will you have of me?"

Swain settled his sword-belt, and sank back upon a stone bench against the wall.

"Why, little enough, Father Bishop. You consider that I have rendered some small services to you of late?"

"I do, Swain, and I shall not forget it. Of your Christianity I have small hope, but your manhood is another story."

"Would you bear witness for me at need?"

"Honestly?"

Swain grinned.

"Are you not a priest?"

"Yes, and was once a warrior?"

"I wish you had remained one. Well, well, there is no sense in regretting what is past. Do you recall the farm of Borgadale that Hroald of Vik always contested with my father?"

"That do I? And Hroald's father, Havard, would not prove his claim by the hot ploughshares."

Swain leaned forward eagerly.

"That is so, Father Bishop! You were there when he refused the chance?"

"I was, I was," said the Bishop dreamily. "It was in the days of my unregenerate youth, when our Blessed Lord had not revealed himself to me. I fear, Swain—yes, yes, I gravely fear—the fact is—humph, well, no matter. Go on with your tale."

"Was there sword-play, Father William?" queried Swain, winking.

"There was," snapped the bishop. "But that had nothing—or, at least, very little—to do with Havard's claim."

"It was not allowed by Jarl Hakon?"

"No, it was never allowed by any of the Jarls that I heard of."

"And would you testify to that on my behalf, if Hroald Havard's son brings suit against me before Jarl Rognvald?"

"I will. Why do you ask?"

Swain told him, and the Bishop stroked a clean-shaven brown face with one corded, muscular hand.

"Let be," he said when Swain had concluded. "Go to Gairsey and bide there. When Hroald comes to Orphir, if he does, I will take care of him for you. Jarl Rognvald is over-ready to heed evil counsel, but I think he will listen to me. If he does not—humph, well, no matter."

Swain grinned again.

"Yes, no matter, Father Bishop. My thanks to you, and my next cruise I will loot you some of those jeweled robes that the priests use in Southern Frankland."

"And a packet or two of incense, Swain, if you can find it," amended Bishop William. "But you need not be concerned for Hroald's claim. We will blast it whenever he sues."

So Swain went off to Gairsey that night, assured that however successful might be those who turned Jarl Rognvald against him he had a stout champion in Bishop William. But what he overlooked—and the bishop, too—was the odd twirl which Fate so often gives to a soundly-laid plan. Between Margad's dull wits and stupid loyalty, and Hroald's avarice and cunning a deal of trouble was to flow across the Caithness dales before the Borgadale claim was settled.

III

AT GAIRSEY Swain found his brother Gunni—an impetuous, hot-headed lad—and his mother Asleif, whom the Orkney-folk called "the Wise." She was a stately dame, who had known much suffering and the death of those dearest to her in her family's feud with Frakork and Olvir Rosta; her thoughts remained concentrated upon her sons and the preservation of the family honor. She was the one woman for whom Swain had any use or to whom he ever showed deference.

To her he told in detail the incidents of his visit to Borgadale and Asleif approved the policy he had adopted.

"You wax great in the land, my son," she said, "and he who waxes great acquires an enemy in every steading. Therefore you must be careful in all that you do not to offend the Jarl or supply those closest to him with an argument for your destruction. However jealous of you Jarl Rognvald may be, he will not dare offend Bishop William and our other friends by judging unjustly against you—nor, indeed, do I think it is in the Jarl's nature to judge unjustly, unless his mind be clouded with suspicions and false evidence."

"You say truly, mother," agreed Swain. "I will be careful in my steps—so far as is consistent with my honor."

"Honor comes before all things," answered Asleif.

It was the Spring of the year, and Swain busied himself with the planting, having determined not to go viking-faring that season, but to devote all his time to improving his lands. And so two weeks passed. The third week was beginning when a man walked into the *skalli* on Gairsey while the household were at their noon-meat. This man was Snorri Sigurd's son, and he was a trader who dwelt in Westrey and traveled from island to island and between the islands and the Scots main. He was very highly thought of, and kept himself apart from all feuds and disorders.

"Greeting, Swain," he said. "I carry a message for you from Margad Grim's son in Caithness."

"You are welcome, Snorri," replied Swain, "message or no message."

"I am not so sure of that," returned Snorri, "for it is in my mind that the message forebodes more trouble than the sender imagined. Margad bids me say to you that he collected the first week's rent from Hakon Klo, and he has slain Hroald of Vik and some others."

Swain pushed back his chair, and a look of amazement struggled across his face. Gunni, his brother, cried out, but Asleif rose silently and crossed to the wall where Swain's arms hung from pegs by the hearth.

"He has slain Hroald!" repeated Swain. "You are certain, Snorri? I bade him use all caution."

Snorri nodded.

"So much I gathered from what he said when I questioned him," answered the trader. "He thought nothing of what he had done, but my belief is that he was tricked into the deed."

"Hroald would never trick a man into being the cause of his own death!" protested Swain.

"No, but Hroald did not reckon sufficiently with Margad's prowess," rejoined Snorri. "Here is what happened, Swain—and I had much trouble drawing so much from Margad, who thought only that he was short a silver merk in the rents you had charged him to collect."

"I would give that silver merk and many more to be quit of Hroald's death at this time," groaned Swain.

"No, no, brother," said Gunni angrily. "We do not need to fear any man's wrath."

"I fear no man's wrath," retorted Swain, "but I seek a short peace for the recovery of my properties. Be silent while I talk with Snorri."

Gunni subsided, and Snorri continued:

"It was this way. Margad went first to Borgadale better than a week gone, and Hakon paid him a merk, albeit sullenly. The next week Margad was busy, and he sent a house-carl for the rent. Hakon told the man the money was not in, and because the carl had no instructions in that case he returned to Dungelsbae and reported to Margad. On the morrow Margad took nineteen men from Dungelsbae and went to Borgadale. There he found Hroald and a dozen more and several of Hakon's people.

"Hakon said again that the money was not in, and Hroald told Margad that he had no right to collect the rent until Jarl Rognvald had decided on the ownership of the land. Margad answered to this that you had bidden him collect the rents, which Hakon had promised to pay, and that he would have the merk, or goods and gear to make up for it. Then there was a great cry from some of Margad's folk in the steadyard that a score of men were coming over the hills from Vik. With that Margad cried that Hroald plotted treachery, and Hroald denied it, and—how it happened Margad knew not—swords were drawn. Before Hroald's other troop came up Margad had slain Hroald and four more and made off."

"Humph," growled Swain. "Plainly, that trick did not go as Hroald had planned it to."

"Perhaps Hroald is not the only one to have a good plan miscarry," said his mother behind him.

Swain turned to her, and bent while she slipped the mail-shirt over his head and adjusted his helmet.

"That cannot be denied, mother," he said. "Hroald dead is more dangerous to me than Hroald living, for it will be proven a dozen times over to Jarl Rognvald that I had Margad in wait to slay him, and all men will laugh at me if I claim that Hroald planned to trap Margad and hold him in play until his friends came to the rescue."

"This is not the worst of my tidings, Swain," resumed Snorri. "I came here by way of Orphir and word already had reached there of Hroald's death. Jarl Rognvald was purple with wrath, and there was a great mustering of shipping."

"For Gairsey?" asked Gunni hopefully.

"No, they were for Caithness. I heard Jarl Rognvald tell another that he would hang Margad's head from the door-post of your *skalli* at Dungelsbae and levy on you such a man-bote as would keep you quiet for a term of years earning it."

Swain flushed.

"As to that, we will see," he said. "Would the Jarl have started by now?"

"No, they were waiting for Haflidi Thorkel's son and Blan Jon's son and others who had fared to Haey. They will not be boun until the morrow."

"Then I shall have time," said Swain.

"For what?" Gunni queried eagerly.

"If you remain quiet, Swain," commented Snorri, "I believe that the Jarl can be persuaded to direct his anger chiefly against Margad."

"That would not be consistent with my honor," replied Swain. "Margad is my man and, though he boggled it, he was doing my work. Nor will I suffer it to be said in the Islands that Swain Olaf's son can not protect his followers even against a Jarl's wrath."

"So I would have you speak, Swain," said Asleif proudly.

"But there is your claim to the Borgadale lands to be considered," urged Snorri. "It is not my business and, as you know, I am not one to mingle in bickers that do not concern me, but you must remember that the Jarl will be disposed to judge in favor of your opponents if you forcibly resist his justice upon Margad. Hroald left a son, who——"

"I have heard of him," interrupted Swain grimly. "As for my lands, I shall take care of them."

"But what will you do?" clamored Gunni.

"I go to Dungelsbae. What I do afterward must depend upon the extent to which Jarl Rognvald is influenced against me."

"Ha," cried Gunni, "then I will call out the house-carls. We shall have a grand battle! Raudabiorg fight will be naught——"

"There will be no battle, if I can avoid it," declared Swain. "We have had enough of fighting in the Orkneyar. A man or two I intend to slay for my own purposes, but that will be all."

"But Jarl Rognvald will fetch all his house-carls and vassals to Dungelsbae!" protested Gunni.

"And much good will it do him," returned Swain. "An apt plan will frustrate many swords."

"At least, I shall be at your side," said Gunni then.

"You will not," answered Swain. "Your place is here by our mother, safeguarding our property in Gairsey. Run to the beach, and have the men shove out my small sailboat. I go alone."

Gunni obeyed reluctantly, with dragging feet, and Swain offered his hand to Snorri.

"I take it kindly that you have served me so in this matter," he said to the trader, "and touching it, nothing shall be said. Will you undertake to serve me further, if you can without scathe to yourself?"

"Gladly," promised Snorri.

"Did you hear of Bishop William in Orphir?"

"He is in Kirkiuvag,* directing the building of the new minster."

"That is well! I would have you go to the bishop, and tell him privately what you have told me, as also, that I go to Dungelsbae, not to resist the Jarl by force of arms, but to save Margad and secure vengeance and justice from those who persecute him, looking to the bishop to do what he can to direct the Jarl to perceive the justice of my case."

"I will do that this night," said Snorri. "I have business which will afford me an excuse for being in Kirkiuvag."

Swain thanked the trader again, kissed his mother and strode from the *skalli*, his eyes aglow with the blue light that made the gooseflesh prickle men's backs when they faced it.

Snorri drained the ale-horn that a serving-man handed him.

"By the worshipful Saint Magnus!" he exclaimed. "I would rather have Jarl Rognvald and all his weapon-muster after me than Swain alone with that look in his eye."

"He walks in honor and without fear," said Asleif. "Therein is he stronger than kings or jarls."

But, womanlike for all her wisdom, she erred in judging the man she loved. Swain was no different from many another warrior in that he observed the honor which seemed best to him and was fearless of danger. But, unlike other men, he walked with an eye directed ever forward into the future; and that was his surest protection, now and at all times.

IV

TO SWAIN it was child's play to steer his little craft, with its single sail, through the Aurrida Firth under Hjalpandisey, east by Tankerness and the Muli of Deerness, and then south and west between the mass of Hrossey and tiny Kolbeinsey, and so on across heaving, gray waters, by Borgarey's crooked shores and the stark cliffs of Rognvaldsey into the swirling currents of the Pentland Firth. He cast a vigilant eye upon the northwestern horizon as he beat past the isolated dot of the Sker, but the early dawn-light—for night had beset him long before this and passed with the briefness of the North—showed no trace of longships. Instead, the Firth lay naked between the far-off shore of Caithness and distant Rognvaldsey, except for the intervening islets of Swiney and Straumsey.

"Jarl Rognvald lies late abed," he grunted with satisfaction.

And he wore around and scudded off before the wind for Dungelsbae, which soon lifted into view as a huddle of low houses and ricks beyond the narrow margin of the strand, where several dragons and longships, barges and transports, were drawn up under sheds.

Somewhat to his amusement, Swain perceived that no watch was being kept around the steading or the village. If any man observed him when he beached his boat, nobody appeared to challenge him, and he walked up to his own *skalli* without meeting more than a few swineherds and farm laborers about their daily tasks.

The *skalli* door stood open. Serving-men were beginning to yawn in the kitchens, a thin trickle of smoke hovered over the hearth, from the curtained door of the hall came a thunderous blase of snores.

"Margad, too, lies late abed," Swain chuckled to himself. "He and the Jarl are fit opponents."

He pushed the leather curtain aside and clattered his sheathed sword upon his shield, with a shout of:

"Slay them! Ho, knaves, up!"

A dozen house-carls staggered from the rushes on the floor, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes and fumbling blindly for weapons. A bull-roar from an inner chamber, and Margad bolted into the hall in his shirt, naked sword in hand.

"To it, carls," he bellowed. "Slice the—Ho, it's you, Swain!"

Swain leaned upon his sword and laughed, but there was little mirth in that laughter.

"Yes, it is I, Margad. If it had been Rognvald, what do you suppose would have happened?"

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*Kirkwall.

Margad blinked.

"The Jarl?" he answered. "Why, he would have asked for meat and ale, and we should have had a talk on the crops."

"Yet you came to meet him sword in hand?"

But Margad shook his head stupidly.

"I heard a shout and steel-rattle. That would not have been Jarl Rognvald. He is our lord, Swain."

"Ah, you know that much! And you consider that the Jarl has no reason for bearing weapons against you?"

Margad was plainly puzzled.

"You jump from one thing to another, Swain," he complained. "There is no trouble between the Jarl and me."

"You consider that the Jarl has no cause of complaint in your slaying of Hroald?"

"If I had not slain Hroald, he would have slain me," said Margad simply. "Jarl Rognvald will not deny to any man the right to defend himself."

"And do you think that is the way Hroald's friends have presented the case to the Jarl?"

"It is the truth."

"What one man calls the truth another man believes a falsehood," said Swain sententiously. "Did I not bid you to walk wary in all that you did with Hakon?"

"So did I," insisted Margad.

"And slew Hroald, who is my enemy and the friend of all my enemies that I warned you were plotting to destroy me!"

"But you bade me also to see that Hakon paid his rent, and he would not," cried Margad. "And when I would have forced him to it I found Hroald in his stead-yard with armed men, and the while we talked more house-carls came from Vik, so that we were like to have been trapped, but that we fought our way clear."

Swain wagged his head sadly.

"I see clearly that you have no understanding of what you have done, Margad," he said. "But the plain truth is that Jarl Rognvald has been told that I set you to slay Hroald, and the Jarl is coming hither today to slay you for punishment."

Margad stood silent for several moments, grappling with the problem this news presented.

"But that is no trouble for you, Swain," he said at last. "It is I the Jarl is angered at——"

"Ho," laughed Swain. "And you believe that he has no feeling against me? He will hold me lucky if he lets me escape him with life!"

"No, no," declared Margad. "I will go out and meet the Jarl alone, and call to him that I slew Hroald for my own satisfaction because of what he said to me in Hakon's stead-yard. And then I will ask the Jarl to come against me with his men—and I will slay as many of them as I can. It is very simple, Swain."

"Very," agreed Swain, smiling. "But I am not a chief to allow his man, wise or fool, to be punished for a deed done in my service. You have put me in a strait place, Margad, but I shall get forth of it in some manner—and you with me."

"The man does not live can outwit or outfight you, Swain," said Margad confidently. "That we all know. And now what would you have me do?"

"Don your mail, muster your men and call up the near-by tenants," replied Swain promptly.

Margad's big face was contorted in a simpering grin.

"Ho, then, we shall fight!"

"We shall not! You are not to draw your sword unless I bid you to."

Swain ate heartily the while Margad complied with his commands, and when his big steward found time to sit at the *skalli* table the Dungelsbae folk were under arms and messengers had been dispatched to summon the tenants. Before noon the stead-yard was crowded with six-score armed men; after they had all been fed Swain spoke to them from the *skalli* door.

"Jarl Rognvald will be coming here today seeking Margad Grim's son," he began.

"Jarl or no, we'll send him away with sword-bites to nurse," cried a young farmer.

"I do not intend to resist the Jarl," replied Swain. "That is what my enemies wish me to do and it is not my way to fulfill the wishes of my enemies."

Men laughed at this, for it was a saying in the Islands that a swift death was a "Swain's bane" and his way with his enemies was well-known and feared.

"I am serious," continued Swain. "If I fought with the Jarl many of you would die, and there is no quarrel to warrant that. Margad has been tricked into a deed which will be misrepresented against him and me, and my one concern is to slay those who are responsible for this and save Margad from the Jarl's wrath."

"Whatever you do, Swain, we will stand by you," said the oldest of the tenant farmers, Thorgir Gutlaf's son. "Your father was always a good lord to us, and as much can be said for you."

"I am gratified that you think so highly of me," replied Swain. "I shall not forget it. But, as I have said, it is not my purpose to cause any man-scathe to my own people. With three score of you I shall retire to Lambaborg, and abide there until I can achieve a plan for securing Margad's safety. For the rest of you, I desire that you go back to your duties and do nothing to create ill-feeling or inspire the Jarl with suspicions."

"But what will you do, Swain?" inquired Thorgir anxiously. "You say that you go to Lambaborg with three-score men, and well I know you could hold it with a score against all the folk in the Orkneyar and Caithness. But the day will come when your food runs out, and that day you must fight free—or perish."

"Be at your ease, Thorgir," replied Swain. "I shall neither starve nor raise my sword against Jarl Rognvald—and yet I shall win what I set out to accomplish."

"If you say so I must believe you," said Thorgir; "but I see not the path for you to follow, and as I am a curious man I shall ask you to allow me to accompany you notwithstanding that my years hamper my activity in the shield-ring."

"I shall be glad of your aid," answered Swain. "Old wits make a strong prop, the *skald* has written."

He selected sixty of the best-armed men in the stead-yard, dismissed the others and marched away across country toward Lambaborg—and Vik. As he crossed the South Hill above the *skalli* the sails of Jarl Rognvald's ships loomed in the north.

The sun was still high when the Jarl landed with three hundred warriors, and followed hot and fast on his track. Gutorm Hroald's son was guide to the Jarl, and he pleaded for permission to put Dungelsbae to the torch; but Jarl Rognvald was at bottom a just man, and despite his anger with Swain he refused to broaden the scope of his punishment.

"These people have not resisted our landing," he said, "and I shall not visit upon them the sins of Swain and Margad. We will follow Margad wherever he goes, and slay him when we find him and if Swain attempts to hold my hand he must look out for his head. But the rest of their folk shall go unharmed, providing they stand clear."

He did not then know that Swain was in Caithness, or even away from Gairsey, because he had never thought to ask the Dungelsbae folk aught save what had become of Margad, and they had been careful to tell him no more than they must.

V

LAMBABORG was a sea-girt rock, jutting into the sea on the east coast of Caithness, which Swain had fortified during the period of his outlawry. On three sides of it the cliffs fell sheer to the surf. On the fourth side a narrow tongue of land joined it to the shore, and across this ran a high stone wall. Inside were shelters for a garrison, a cistern and a quantity of firewood, which Swain's party added to while they were waiting for Jarl Rognvald to discover their hiding-place.

Swain himself, accompanied his men only so far as the wall. Then he drew to one side, and called Thorgir and Margad to him. It was now dusk, and he knew that Jarl Rognvald would not continue the pursuit at night lest he fall into an ambush.

"Thorgir," he said, "you are the oldest of my followers, and in this work I require a man whose temper is checked by slow blood. I go now with Margad to execute a certain vengeance, and I would have you bide close in the hold, preserving a vigilant watch, but using no unnecessary violence against any man who comes at you."

Margad said nothing to this, but Thorgir was much disturbed.

"You are chief, Swain," he answered, "but is it the part of wisdom, after you have gained a safe shelter to abandon it? Also, two men are not so sure as twenty."

"There you are wrong," returned Swain. "In what I propose to do two men are surer than two-score. Be at your ease. If we do not return before Jarl Rognvald comes here, look for us from the sea-side and have ready ropes to aid us to climb the cliffs."

Thorgir promised he would fulfill Swain's orders, but he still showed his disapproval of them.

"There goes the chief," he said as Swain disappeared in the darkness. "Now I must bear the brunt of the Jarl's anger, for it is not likely Swain will ever return."

And as Swain had expected, he was inspired to great caution and instructed the sentinels he posted outside the walls not to resist any attack upon them, but to retire as soon as they detected any one approaching. But that night passed without incident in Lambaborg, and it was noon of the next day before a fishing-boat from Vik perceived that the hold was garrisoned and sent the intelligence to the Jarl and Gutorm Hroald's son, who were combing the western dales because they had suspected that Margad would make for the wild country of Sudrland on the Scots marches, where only the Redbeards dwelt and such outlaws as lacked the means to go viking-faring.

In the meantime Swain and Margad trotted through the night, and presently Margad perceived that they were headed toward Borgadale.

"Ho," said he. "We are not to sit quiet and await the ax!"

Swain stopped in his tracks.

"Not a word from you, Little-wit," he said. "Do what I bid, and naught else. I'll not have another plan ruined by you."

That was the last word spoken between them until they sighted the lights of the *skalli* in Borgadale, and Swain slackened his pace and told Margad to lead the way as he was better acquainted with the country. But their approach was unobstructed, and they were still a long way from the buildings of the stead when the babble of voices and drunken songs acquainted them that an ale-drinking was in progress in the hall.

"Humph," said Swain. "I am of a mind to learn what cause for joy Hakon Klo has discovered. Is there a window through which we can observe them?"

"Yes, under the eaves on the south side," answered Margad. "You can stand upon my shoulders and look in."

"We will do that," said Swain.

They passed safely through the ricks and kine-yards, and reached the heavy timber wall of the *skalli*. High up under the eaves was a small, oblong opening, so placed to make it difficult for an enemy to surprize sleepers in the night.

Margad straddled his powerful legs, propped his shield and spear against the wall and stood stolidly while Swain climbed his back and rose erect upon his shoulders. Most other men would have been prostrated by such a burden; Margad did not even sway to the pressure of two hundred and fifty pounds of flesh and iron.

The *skalli* hall was brightly illuminated. Torches flared in brackets, a fire roared on the hearth and candles burned on the high table where Hakon Klo sat with half a dozen others. The Swede's shirt was open at the neck and he pecked with his steel hook at the table's surface as he sang or boasted. He was talking when Swain peered through the window.

"Margad we will flay when we catch him," he cried. "Gutorm and I have planned it all. We'll make short work of it, I tell you."

"How is it that you have not joined the chase?" asked one of the men at the table.

"That was Gutorm's idea. 'It may be Margad will try to burn the stead,' he said. 'Guard it until we make sure of him.' Well, by candle-lighting we made certain he was not coming this way, and I sent off the men to join in the hunt. I'll go after them in the morning."

"Margad is too big a man to take alive," objected another man.

"We will noose him if he does not yield," rejoined Hakon.

"Then you will have Swain upon your shoulders," spoke up a third.

Hakon laughed drunkenly.

"Swain! He is a much over-rated man, my friend. Why, I fronted him out there in the stead-yard, and he did not lift weapon against me."

"Perhaps he had a reason for that," suggested the man who had spoken first.

"Bah! Reason or no reason, we'll slay him, too," declared the Swede. "Gutorm and I have planned it all. So soon as we have finished Margad, we will take ship with Jarl Rognvald and ravage Gairsey. Ho, ho, we have friends, Gutorm and I! Friends who are not friends to Swain. We'll divide his property between us and I'll not be a tenant farmer then."

Swain dropped lightly to the ground.

"No," he muttered, "you will not be a tenant farmer then—nor many minutes more!"

"What did you say?" grumbled Margad, who had not heard him.

"I forelooked the future, Little-wit. Come with me."

And he strode boldly and without attempt at concealment to the entrance of the *skalli*. In the ale-room, just within the door, two serving-men were filling flagons. They looked up fearfully, cowering before Swain's bristling beard and flashing sword.

"In there!" he snarled, and drove them before him into the hall, tearing the leather curtain from its pole as he tramped after them, Margad at his heels.

Hakon had an ale-cup to his lips; a grin of exultation was frozen comically upon his face. His friends revealed varying degrees of consternation. Not one of them had more than a knife at his belt. The pile of their weapons was plainly visible on the opposite side of the hall.

"I am here concerning the division of my property you spoke of, Hakon," said Swain softly. "Also touching the rent due me for these, my lands."

Hakon set down the ale-cup and gradually the color flooded back into his face.

"You think yourself safe because you bear arms and we do not," he sneered. "But you forget that I have only to call out and——"

"I heard you say that you had sent off your men at candle-lighting," broke in Swain.

The Swede flinched at this. His friends looked worried.

"Nonetheless, we are seven to your two," replied Hakon, "and I have serving-men within call."

"Who would run into the night at the flicker of my blade," said Swain. "No, no, Hakon, you are in my power."

Hakon jumped to his feet and snatched up the heavy chair he had been sitting on.

"That is to be seen," he shouted. "Come, we can slay the two of them without steel."

But his friends hung back.

"It will be best to make a composition with Swain," proposed one of them.

"I tell you we can force our way to our swords," cried Hakon, and he leaped to the table-top, brandishing the chair over his head in one hand, his steel hook gleaming at the extremity of his other arm.

Swain laughed.

"I am glad to see that you are not afraid to fight, for all your boasting," he said.

"I have killed many men in my time," retorted Hakon. "I do not wear this claw for nothing."

"That is good hearing," answered Swain. "For I intend to give you a chance to use it. As for you—" he turned to the half-dozen men who stared at him with averted eyes from behind the slight barrier of the high table—"I am come here seeking one man's death. I bear no malice against you, and if you die, or any of you, it must be your own doing."

"What is your meaning in that, Swain?" inquired the man who had proposed their reaching a composition with Swain; his name was Dagfinn, and he was a small *bondi* in Caithness.

"I am in the habit of saying what I mean and no less," returned Swain. "Keep your hands clean of this quarrel and you shall go unharmed."

Dagfinn turned to the others.

"For myself, I have nothing against Swain," he said. "It seems to me his terms are fair, providing he does not intend to murder Hakon."

"He shall have his chance in fair fight against one of us," said Swain, "whichever one he chooses."

"Either one of them is larger and stronger than I," cried Hakon. "It would not be fair."

Swain's eyes sparked in the torch-light.

"We will fight you unarmed—a knife against your claw," he said.

"That is certainly fair," spoke up Dagfinn, and the other men murmured assent.

But Hakon was not yet satisfied.

"You are both famous warriors and I am a poor tenant farmer," he said.

"Did I not hear you say recently that I was a much over-rated man?" asked Swain.

"It is so," growled Hakon.

"Ah! Then I am at your service," rejoined Swain, and he made to doff his helmet.

"No, no," exclaimed the Swede. "If one of you I must fight, let it be Margad."

"And there you are wise," pronounced Swain. "Better brawn without brain for your purpose. Little-wit," he added to his follower, "throw off your mail and show us what your strength can accomplish against Hakon's guile."

A pleased grin shone on the big man's face.

"I am to have him to do what I please

with?" he asked, clumsily slipping his mail-shirt over his shoulders. "I'll break the snake's back."

"Humph!" replied Swain. "He is more wolf than snake. You had best look out for his claw. A big man can be disembowelled as easily as a little man."

"Leave him to me, Swain," chuckled Margad, hopping grotesquely across the hall in his shirt. "That *bitling* will be as easy to stamp on as a cold louse. I could snare him with any two fingers. Come, Hakon! Let us make a quick end to it."

The Swede's answer was to hurl his chair at Margad's head. Margad clumped to one side, but not quick enough to escape a blow upon the shoulder. He stumbled under the impact, and the chair flew apart, but in another instant the giant had recovered his balance and sprang for the table with a roar that echoed through the vaulted chamber. Hakon leaped high in air, clean over Margad's head, caught at a rafter with one hand and swung to the other side of the hall. He would have seized a spear from the discarded weapons, if Swain had not stepped between him and the heap and, with a baffled hiss of rage, he turned to confront Margad's attack, while Swain retreated to give the pair ample foot-room.

Margad lumbered forward with arms wide like a bear, intent upon crushing his foe. Hakon crouched, his clawed wrist advanced so that he could slash down or sidewise, and he dodged from right to left, evading the giant's blind rushes. Once Margad overtook him and would have swept him in his embrace, but the steel claw gleamed in a long, raking arc and a spurt of blood traced its course down Margad's shoulder and forearm. The big man dropped back bewildered, spattering the blood around him. Hakon yelped in glee.

"Look to his claw," warned Swain. "Well are you named Little-wit, Margad."

"There will be no knowing him when I have stayed ripping him," shouted Hakon.

"It needs more than such pricks to hurt me, Hakon," rasped Margad, and his little eyes became red with the fever of the blood-lust.

The six men behind the high table drew together and held their breath, for this was a fight that promised to be famous for long years to come in *skalds'* songs and sayings.

Back and forth, up and down the length of the hall, the pair stamped and ran. Margad drove Hakon through the fire on the hearth, and soot and ashes flew in every direction. He got one hand on the tail of the Swede's jerkin and tore it from him, and after that Hakon was half-naked. The hard-packed earth of the floor was powdered under Margad's thundering tread, and a fine dust rose and mingled with the clouds of smoke and ashes. The two serving-men huddled against the wall, mouths gaping, eyes wide. Only Swain watched the struggle without visible evidence of feeling, his eyes hard, his jaw set in stern lines.

The giant had disdained to draw the knife at his belt which was the one weapon allowed him by the terms Swain had stated; he fought with his bare hands against the Swede's deadly claw, and his brute strength and tremendous virility were matched with the lesser man's agility and cunning. Nor was the fight unequal. Hakon panted from the effort of eluding Margad's sweeping arms, but his body was unmarked where Margad's shoulders, arms, cheeks and thighs dripped blood, for at such close quarters it was impossible to avoid the swift slashes of the steel hook. Time and again Hakon missed the final rip to the belly by the fraction of an inch.

And as the minutes passed, and he remained alive and saw the damage he was able to wreak upon his enemy, Hakon's confidence grew. He shook off the racking fear which had hampered his earlier attempts. His arrogance and boastfulness returned. If he was pressed for wind, Margad sobbed like a foundered horse. One stroke, and he knew victory would be in his grasp. Victory *was* in his grasp, he assured himself. And with that assurance dawned the thought that he might as well make the victory complete.

From the corner of his eye, as he danced away from Margad's staggering assaults, he watched Swain leaning sternly on his sword by the heap of weapons next the north wall. Swain's attention seemed to be directed entirely toward the fighting between the two men. So far as could be seen, he had no thought for himself or anything else, and Hakon framed his new plan in the time it takes to wipe a sweat-soaked brow.

"My patience is gone, Margad," he gasped. "This is the end."

To the big man's amazement he attacked in his turn, leaping in close with a savagery that drove Margad to a dazed retreat. Back, the two reeled, the hook stabbing and slashing, Margad fending clumsily with hand and arm. Back across the hall. Past the discarded weapons, to where Swain was standing, and for the first time there was a hint of misgiving in Swain's eyes.

"Stand to it, Little-wit," he called.

"No, no, this is for you," answered Hakon.

And with a sudden, hurtling leap the Swede carried himself to Swain's side. Out flashed his hook, straight and true, in a slash above the collar of the mail-shirt at Swain's unguarded throat. So quick it came that nobody saw it—except Swain. But Swain was as vigilant as the wolf he had likened Hakon to. All his life he had spent in warding unexpected blows. His brain and hand worked in perfect harmony. Up flashed his sword and the blade sheared through Hakon's wrist a hand's-breadth above the strap that held the hook. Wrist and claw clinked on the floor. Hakon staggered on sagging limbs as the blood spouted from the severed veins, and Swain stepped out of reach of the flood.

"I fear you shall yet lose the whole of that arm, Hakon," he mocked.

"Say, rather, his head," exclaimed Margad.

The giant fell upon the wounded man with a might which crumpled the last, pitiful resistance that was left and bore him to the ground.

"Hew off his head with his own hook," commanded Swain. "Jarl Rognvald was to place your head on Dungelsbae *skalli*, so I am of a mind to find a fit perch here for Hakon's."

"His head you shall have, Swain," puffed Margad happily, "but by your leave, I am of a mind to prove to him that I am not dependant upon steel to rive the head of such as he from his neck."

"Peace," gasped Hakon from the floor. "Quarter—"

Margad gave a swift, twisting wrench with his great hands; there was a tearing, rending sound as of boards drawn from the pegs—and the giant held aloft the grinning head of the Swede.

"He pulled it off!" cried Dagfinn.

And the six at the high table and the serving-men by the door drew closer than ever, their eyes goggling with horror.

"So did he," answered Swain. "And I call upon all of you to witness that Hakon was slain in fair fight, after he had abused the terms he had set with us. I also call upon you to bear witness for me to Jarl Rognvald that I have harmed none other here, nor shall I do any harm to Hakon's gear, save to take from it such money, or its equivalent, as will make up the seven silver merks he promised me for rent."

The men at the high table looked uncomfortably at each other.

"We will so bear witness, Swain," said Dagfinn at last, and the others, in response to the silent query in Swain's eyes, quavered their assent.

"Then our task here is finished, Margad," said Swain. "Clap that carrion's head on the *skalli's* roof-tree and we will be off. To this extent we have prospered—and no thanks therefor to your wits—but we have many hazards yet to venture and one more slaying to compass."

Long after Swain and Margard had departed from the *skalli* Dagfinn and the five other guests debated the meaning of Swain's last remark. They decided that he had in mind Gutorm Hroald's son, but they agreed they had best say nothing of it, whatever else they communicated to the Jarl.

"I am in no haste to have my head pulled from my spine," commented Dagfinn. "It is well-known Swain is a bitter enemy to those he hates."

VI

SWAIN and Margad returned to Lambaborg about dawn, and Thorgir greeted them with great relief. They had seen no signs of Jarl Rognvald's people for the reason mentioned before: that the pursuers of Margad had fared westward. It was not until the following morning, about the middle of the forenoon, that the Jarl and his company marched up to the stone wall which defended the hold, with shields interlocked and swords bared. Swain and his men watched the advance of the besiegers from the battlement of the wall and, by Swain's order, there was no show of steel.

At a bow-shot's distance, Rognvald's company halted, and the Jarl, himself, stood forward with a group of his chiefs—Gutorm Hroald's son, Haflidi Thorkel's son, Blan Jon's son, Dufnial Havard's son and others.

"Ho, Swain," called the Jarl. "Come and answer to me for your misdeeds."

"Here I am, Lord Jarl," replied Swain from the battlements. "But I have committed no misdeeds to answer for."

"You have procured the slaying of Hroald of Vik and yourself aided Margad, there, besides you, to slay Hakon Klo," retorted the Jarl angrily. "It is useless for you to add lying to your other sins. I have heard all of what you have done."

"I have been accused of many offenses, Jarl Rognvald," answered Swain calmly, "but none of my enemies hitherto has said that I lied. As for the slaying of Hroald, it is perhaps useless for me to tell you that it was done by a man whose stupidity led him to commit a blunder which appears to have delivered me into the hands of my enemies. But if Dagfinn and the others who were at Borgadale *skalli* told you the truth of what occurred there night before last, you must know that Hakon was slain fairly after he had foully attempted to kill me."

The Jarl flushed under the brim of his gilded helm and ground his heel impatiently in the hallow dirt. And Dufnial Havard's son, who had not feared to speak up in Swain's behalf in Jarl Rognvald's *skalli* at Orphir, now corroborated Swain's latest claim.

"That is true, Lord Jarl," he declared. "We all heard Dagfinn's story and the others with him did not deny it."

"It is of no matter," exclaimed the Jarl. "Swain had no right to take any man's life in a personal dispute."

"If you succeed in establishing that law, Lord Jarl, you will have accomplished more than any of your predecessors," remarked Swain drily, and many of those in the Jarl's array snickered at the thrust.

The Jarl flushed redder than ever.

"Who are you to bandy words with your lord?" he demanded.

"I am Swain Olaf's son, a *bondi* and chief of the Orkneyar," rejoined Swain; "and it is known to all men that I do not fear you or any other lord, however powerful. I stand upon my rights and I tell you frankly, Jarl Rognvald, that you act in your own despite if you permit my enemies to tempt you to misuse me."

"Hear the rebel," cried Gutorm Hroald's son. "He defies the Jarl as though he were the King at Bjorgvin or the Emperor of Mikligard.* Let us hew him down!"

"Yes, yes! Let us hew him down," assented Haflidi and Blan.

But there was no answering rumble from the Jarl's host, for men began to suspect that if the Jarl succeeded in humbling Swain there would be more to suffer in the same way, and the Orkney-folk were never inclined to bow supinely to any ruler. A rough hand they respected, and a rough tongue they obeyed, grumbling perforce; but let tyranny weigh the hand, or edge the tongue and they were quick to rebel. Always they loved a stout rebel, and therefore all his life they loved Swain Olaf's son, a fact which Jarl Rognvald had yet to learn.

"All men may hear what Gutorm says," answered Swain. "He and his friends reveal themselves for what they are, and I am content to let the Orkney-folk judge between us."

"The Orkney-folk have judged," retorted Jarl Rognvald, "for I am lord of the Orkneyar, and I say that you are rebel against my authority. Your life is any man's who can take it, if you persist."

"It grieves me to hear you say that, Lord Jarl," said Swain, "for I have made up my mind not to draw a weapon against you, unless it be in self-defense."

The Jarl's face brightened.

"In that case, Swain, we are not so far apart," he replied. "Come down and surrender to me, and you shall have quarter and a fair hearing on all points brought against you."

"So far as I am concerned, that would be satisfactory, Lord Jarl," said Swain. "But what of Margad?"

The Jarl's mouth clamped tight in a thin line.

"Margad must stand trial here and now," he declared. "He has disturbed the peace of the land and very evily slain one of my chiefs."

"It would not be honorable for me to yield Margad to you," said Swain then. "To do so would be no other than to deliver him to Gutorm and the other friends of Hroald and Hakon, and I am bound to say that whatever Margad did he did it for me, and for it, however foolish it was, I am responsible. He is my man and it is for me to defend his rights."

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*Constantinople.

"All of this is a different way of saying that you will continue to defy me," shouted the Jarl with renewed anger.

"I wish very much to be at peace with you, Lord Jarl," answered Swain, "but Margad's life——"

"Hear the traitor!" clamored Gutorm. "He would be at peace with his lord, after he has plundered his land and followed the highways like a thief!"

And Blan Jon's son shouted—

"You make a bad return to the Jarl for all the honors he has bestowed upon you, Swain."

"I have no doubt that you can suggest to him men who will profess themselves more grateful," observed Swain.

"Peace, peace," commanded Jarl Rognvald impatiently. "Have you said your last word, Swain?"

"I have, Lord Jarl, and I pray that you will heed it with reason."

"I will give it the attention its impudence warrants," snapped the Jarl "Forward, archers!"

The archers who had lurked behind the shield-wall began to advance, and Swain bade his people drop behind the battlements of the *borg* where they would be safe, for he was resolved to do the Jarl's people no manscathe unless they actually assaulted the walls and he must slay or be slain. But before the first arrow was loosed, a man in the rear of the Jarl's host shouted that a clerk was riding up at a fast pace, and the Jarl called back his men to see what was toward.

Swain, watching from the battlements, perceived the monkish robes that trailed about the horse's flanks and suspected that the man was a messenger from Bishop William, as was, indeed, the fact.

"Now we are like to have a respite," he said.

The clerk rode through the ranks of Jarl Rognvald's host up to where the Jarl stood.

"I give you a fair greeting, Lord Jarl, and the blessing of my master, the bishop," he said.

The Jarl frowned with some misgiving.

"You are welcome, holy father," he answered. "Do you come to intercede with these unruly men who have defied us?"

"I bear a message for you in private," answered the clerk evasively.

"Ah!" said Jarl Rognvald very unhappily.

And he led the way to a flat rock upon which he took his seat, while his own men and Swain's looked on with equal interest.

"What is this word which Bishop William deems sufficiently important that it should reach me in the midst of battle?" he inquired.

"Briefly, that you should not bring about a battle," said the clerk in his sing-song, monkish voice.

"Not bring about a battle!" repeated Jarl Rognvald. "What has the Father Bishop to do with my battles or the way in which I rule my men?"

"Only this, Lord Jarl: that it interferes with the building of the new minster at Kirkiuvag when so many men are diverted to warfare."

"I will make up for that when we have finished Swain's punishment," promised the Jarl hopefully.

"No, Lord Jarl, the holy bishop says further by me that it will be most unfortunate if the Islands are racked by more bloody strife so soon after you have taken possession of them. Most unfortunate!" The clerk echoed himself dismally. "Oh, very unfortunate! The holy bishop was most wrought up when word came to him that you and Swain had clashed.

" 'What will folk think?' he said. 'What will they say when they see our Lord Jarl and Swain, the chief who did most to aid him in winning his dominions, at the point of their swords? Will they not believe that Jarl Rognvald, being anxious not to be under such heavy obligations to any common man, had determined to rid himself of Swain once and for all? Oh, sorry day! Oh, disastrous complication!' "

The clerk fixed his eyes dismally upon the stone wall of the *borg*, lined with men in mail.

"Many poor souls must die unshriven to scale those heights," he sighed.

Jarl Rognvald grunted in sour disgust.

"I can see the other side of a hole as well as the next man," he snarled. "Bishop William sends me warning not to bear arms against Swain, knowing naught of my reasons——"

"Ah, Lord Jarl, but you wrong the holy Father Bishop," remonstrated the clerk. "He thinks of all his flock, the low and the humble as well as the great and the rich. It is because he would not see aught done to stir you from your high repute amongst the Orkney-folk that he suggests that you pursue caution in all you do here, and be not guided by those who, perhaps, have ulterior purposes in view."

"Oh, yes, wrap it up smoothly," growled the Jarl. "A sour apple in a red skin tastes none the less bitter for the covering. Well, you may tell the bishop——"

"He is so concerned over this unfortunate business," interrupted the clerk as if the Jarl had not spoken. "I doubt not he is on his knees this moment, praying for your lordship. 'Alas,' he said, 'how terrible it would be did the Lord Jarl launch the beginnings of strife which would drive him from the Islands and set up a new lord in his stead—after we have become used to our Jarl and his ways, too.' "

Jarl Rognvald rose abruptly. In his mind's eye he reviewed the growing domain of the Church in the Islands, the war-like past of the bishop, his cousinship with Swain's family, his influence with the several chiefs and the older families of power. No, he decided, he dared not risk the bishop's enmity.

"Go back to the bishop," he said abruptly. "Tell him that Margad, Swain's man, has committed a crime for which he must be punished. Also, that Swain has rebelled against me to protect Margad, and that I shall besiege him until he surrenders; but that if he does not use violence toward me I will be equally lenient to him. More I can not promise."

The clerk bowed and traced the sign of the cross in air.

"I am certain these tidings will go far to ease the holy bishop's mind," he answered. "My humble blessing to his upon your fortunes, Lord Jarl."

Jarl Rognvald strode back to his men with a thunder-cloud mantling his face.

"Make camp," he commanded. "Let no man lift a weapon at Swain's people, unless they assail us."

Gutorm started to offer objection, but a single look from the Jarl quelled him, and amongst most of the Jarl's men there was secret satisfaction that they should not have to come to hand grips with so redoubtable a warrior as Swain.

Swain, on the battlements, waved his men to their ordinary duties.

"The bishop has spoken," he said. "There will be no fighting."

VII

FOR two weeks Jarl Rognvald laid siege to Lambaborg, and Swain and his men husbanded their provisions as well as they could; but by the beginning of the third week they were scraping their pouches and he was lucky who shot down a sea-fowl or caught a fish in an occasional pool under the cliffs. So Swain drew all his folk together on a certain evening, and addressed them thus:

"If we bide as we are we shall either starve or surrender to our enemies. I had thought that we might wear out Jarl Rognvald's patience or induce him to grant mercy to Margad, but it is plainly to be seen that he is neither mercifully inclined nor disposed to tire of the siege. It is true that we might make a quick sally by night, and cut our way through his camp, yet that again would mean the deaths of many of you, and I am loath to command such a course so long as another way lies open."

"And what is that way, Swain?" asked Thorgir. "I am an old man, and life holds little for me, so that, perhaps, I am alone when I say that I am ready to follow your guidance at any cost."

"No, no," cried the others. "Young or old, we are with you as long as we can swing swords."

And they made such a clashing on their shields that all the besiegers stood to arms, fearing an attack.

"You are loyal comrades," answered Swain. "The chief who commands you is fortunate, and I am the more inclined not to sacrifice any of you because another time may come when every sword here will have its use."

"Now or then, we are ready," Thorgir assured him.

"It shall not be now," Swain told him. "Our one difficulty here is over Margad. The rest of you Jarl Rognvald will give quarter to, and I am sure that we might all go free by yielding him to the Jarl. But I have not the heart to deliver him under the ax. Therefore I suggest that you fasten ropes together and lower Margad and me over the cliffs into the water. The weather is calm, and it shall go hard with us if we do not succeed in swimming beyond the cordon the Jarl's people have strung about us. After that we shall discover some means of winning forth of Caithness and I will establish Margad in a safe haven and then return to you."

There was considerable discussion of this proposal, with many speaking against it, for there was a hale brotherly feeling amongst all those on the rock, and not a man but would have been glad to offer his life to redeem his fellows. But there was no passing Swain's argument. On the one hand, they had choice of attempting to fight free at the price of heavy manscathe; on the other, they must reckon with either surrender or starvation. Betwixt the alternatives was Swain's plan and in the end they adopted it.

The two men stripped off their armor and outer clothing, and discarded all weapons except their knives. Then Swain bade Thorgir acquaint Jarl Rognvald on the morrow that he was gone and offer to surrender with quarter for all of them.

"Promise obedience and fealty to the Jarl," instructed Swain, "and tell him I shall soon wait upon him. Do not be tempted into broiling with Gutorm Hroald's son or any of his folk, but go to your homes and await word from me."

"Will there be a long time to wait, Swain?" asked one of the younger men.

"It may be long and it may be short," replied Swain. "But see that none of you shed blood. The only blood which will flow I shall be the taker of."

Margad and he bound the ropes beneath their arm-pits, and were lowered over the verge of the cliffs until they gained the water. On a stormy night along this coast they would speedily have been dashed to pieces against the rocks. But on the night of their escape it was possible for strong swimmers to force a way through the surf, and once beyond the line of breakers they made light of swimming a mile southward, when they headed in-shore and climbed to the top of the cliffs at a point where a small cove broke the iron barrier.

They did not stay to dry themselves, but trotted on south as far as Vik, which was deserted by its men, all of whom were with Gutorm aiding Jarl Rognvald in the siege of Lambaborg.

"This is as it should be," said Swain, striding past the groups of frightened women and children and old people. "We will make use of some of Gutorm's property to aid us further."

And he looted a quantity of food, two swords, a small barrel of ale and some leather shoon from Gutorm's *skalli*, and then assisted Margad in launching the most weatherly of the small fishing-vessels on the beach.

"Where now?" asked Margad as they stood out to sea.

The giant had accepted all their adventures with the placidity of one too stupid to know fear, although there was no denying that he had exhibited some relief as they shook the dust of Caithness from their heels.

"To Scotland," answered Swain.

"Why Scotland?" queried Margad. "We are not Scots. In Norway, now——"

"Jarl Rognvald's long arm would stretch across the seas and pluck you to your doom, Little-wit," returned Swain. "In Scotland you may stay at liberty, and since the Scots are constantly fighting amongst themselves it is likely that I can find some lord who will give you his protection in return for that lusty body of yours, albeit I shall surely warn him he need expect naught from your head."

Margad grinned, entirely satisfied.

"That is good hearing," he said. "All I ask is food and drink and a chance to fight. Perhaps my ill-luck will not follow me to Scotland."

"Your ill-luck!" snorted Swain. "You will have ill-luck whenever you try to think."

They broke their fast as they sailed, but the morning was not half over when the wind freshened and they were compelled to shorten sail, and while they were in the act of doing so a small trading-vessel scudded toward them from the north. Swain regarded it suspiciously.

"That is an Orkney craft, if I ever went to sea," he said. "Well, at the worst we can give her people a stiff fight. If they are traders, they may be short of arms."

"Since we are wet, a fight will dry us," remarked Margad cheerfully.

But as the trader drew up alongside of them Swain recognized Snorri Sigurd's son at the steering-oar, and Snorri hailed them with delight.

"How is this, Swain?" he shouted, luffing across the smaller boat's bow. "When I sailed from Dungelsbae yesterday you were fast in Lambaborg?"

"And now I am outside," retorted Swain. "Whither are you bound, Snorri?"

"For Edinburgh in Scotland, and after to Bretlan.*"

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* Britain.

"Are you of a mind to give passage to a pair of naked refugees? If Jarl Rognvald hears of it you will likely suffer his displeasure."

Snorri hesitated a moment. As has been said before, he was always noted for his caution in not mixing in feuds.

"To any other than you I would say no, Swain," he answered finally. "But well I know that you are fighting the battle of all common men in the Orkneys when you contest the Jarl's power, and, furthermore, your enemies are men I am never likely to number amongst my friends. Come with us and I will aid you in every way I can. My men are close-mouthed fellows and can keep a secret as well as their master."

So the upshot of the meeting was that Swain and Margad scrambled into Snorri's vessel, and Snorri took their boat in tow.

"You will have need of funds if you visit Edinburgh," he commented, "and while I shall be pleased to furnish all that you require, it will hurt none of us if we sell the Scots one of Gutorm's boats."

VIII

THE morning after Swain and Margad had escaped Thorgir went upon the battlements of Lambaborg and shouted that he wished to converse with Jarl Rognvald, and when the Jarl came forward with his shield-bearer and chiefs and Thorbiron Klerk, his forecastle man, Thorgir told him of the departure of the two. At first the Jarl would not credit Thorgir's story, but when Thorgir offered to march out with all his folk and allow him to search the hold the Jarl was compelled to accept it.

Gutorm Hroald's son waxed furious over the news and besought the Jarl to take toll of Thorgir and his followers; but in the intervening weeks the Jarl had thought frequently upon Bishop William's message, and he rejected indignantly all of Gutorm's suggestions.

"The task for you to accomplish is to pursue Swain and Margad," he said, "but I do not think that you will catch them. If you do, I do not envy you."

And the Jarl turned to his other chiefs.

"The truth is," he continued, "that Swain has no equal amongst us all for bravery and resource. Such feats as his are hardy, and set the young warriors an example of daring which will improve the spirit of our whole array. I do not approve of all his conduct, but I say this in common justice to him, and I warn Gutorm that if he compasses Swain's death he must answer for it to me. Indeed, I should not like to be responsible for Swain's death in the present circumstances, myself."

Then he called up Thorgir, and said to him:

"I will not abuse my power over you, although many would say that you have been rebels against my authority. Go to your homes and tell your men they are at peace with me, if they stay there."

"Lord Jarl, those are good words, and eke wise ones," quoth Thorgir. "I am an old man, and I say so."

"If all old men were as courageous as you I would have graybeards waving above my shield-wall," returned the Jarl. "Did Swain give you any private word for me?"

Thorgir told him of Swain's parting message, and the Jarl tapped his sword-hilt reflectively.

"Now, what might Swain mean by that?" he muttered. "If he waits upon me it will be with a purpose. Well, well, if you see him you may tell him that I am anxious to be at peace with him. We may not be friends, but at least we can live without hostility."

After this Gutorm Hroald's son, having been unable to find trace of Swain since he and Margad had sailed from Vik, went to Orphir and moved a suit for the judgment to him of possession of the Borgadale lands, but the Jarl put it aside.

"Time enough for that later," he said. "I have Swain's word that he will return."

And that was the last word he would say upon the subject. Gutorm was very wroth and discontented. But Bishop William praised the Jarl openly for showing moderation and leniency, and reasonable men said that the Jarl revealed better sense than had been his wont. The factions stood apart, and there was peace from the Sudrland marches to the far tip of Hjaltland.*

IX

THAT night the wind blew up a storm, and Snorri's vessel was driven south all of the next day until toward evening they came to the mouth of the Myrkvi Firth.† With the darkness, the stress of the weather and the gray waves lapping over the bulwarks, Snorri feared to sail on up to Edinburgh.

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* Shetland. † Firth of Forth.

"But there is Maeyar,"* he said, pointing at a rocky isle ahead of them. "It is inhabited by a community of holy monks, and I doubt not they will let us moor our vessels in their harbor and give us shelter in their house."

"If they refuse us their hospitality we can take it from them," replied Swain. "But in any event we had better go to them."

They made the tiny harbor-cove of the island without difficulty, beached Snorri's craft and climbed the rocks to the gate of the monastery buildings. But nobody answered their knocks for some time, and at last Swain raised his voice and shouted:

"Ho, monks, we are twelve men, hardy and desperate. Let us in or we will enter and burn."

At that a grate in the door was unlatched and a quavering voice replied—

"Wanderers, are you pirates or peaceable folk?"

"We are Orkney-folk," answered Swain, "and when we are not given what we ask for, we take it."

"We are only monks within," continued the quavering voice, "and we have naught but lentils and fish and oaten-bread—and little of that."

"Humph!" retorted Swain. "I know little of Christians, but it sticks in my mind that Bishop William, my cousin, instructed me they were obliged to share what they possessed with the needy, however little it might be."

The man at the grate clucked his tongue.

"So you are cousin to Bishop William! And who are you, then?"

"I am called Swain Olaf's son."

"That bloody pirate! Oh, your pardon, Swain! Your pardon! The words slipped from my tongue. Indeed, I know——"

"Who might you be?" interrupted Swain coldly.

"A poor monk named Baldwin who administers this community as prior, under favor of Holy Church."

"Well, Prior Baldwin, I am not of those who fight for a name. Call me what you please, since you are a monk. If you were a fighting man, now— But no matter. We are hungry and wet. Do we enter?"

The door jangled open, and Prior Baldwin and his monks huddled back against the stone wall of the entrance passage. Swain paused at the threshold and sniffed the air.

"What do I smell?" he asked. "It is like wood-smoke, and yet——"

"We have been praying for our patron, the noble Hilda, and that is the incense Brother Colin lighted for——"

"Incense," repeated Swain. "That is what Bishop William wished me to procure him. And where do you get this incense?"

"It comes from a former brother of our community who serves in the chapel of the Pope, himself, and——"

"Cannot I come by it any nearer?" demanded Swain.

The prior shook his head.

"Some I must have," reflected Swain. "Bishop William——"

Prior Baldwin crossed himself, trembling.

"No violence, Swain," he pleaded. "We are old men and feeble. And, in truth, we have but little of the incense and that scarce sufficient for the needs of our chapel."

"Who spoke of violence?" growled Swain.

The prior glanced fearfully at the long swords and axes of the Norsemen.

"Why, as to that——"

"We will eat," interrupted Swain. "Come, Snorri, Margad! Lead on the men. Food there must be where monks live."

He grinned at the prior's livid face.

"I have had rare pickings in monasteries in Spainland and Frankland and Italy," he said. "They are frequently rich."

Prior Baldwin muttered a quick prayer.

"Take what you require, Swain, and go," he quavered.

"That is my custom," observed Swain drily.

The Orkneymen found their way to the kitchens and ate a lusty meal, and thereafter they made themselves comfortable in two rooms adjoining. The monks kept out of their path.

"We are very fortunate to be here," remarked Snorri as they stretched out in their fur sleeping-bags, listening to the wind howling outside the walls.

"That we are," added Margad. "We have plenty to eat, a roof over us and naught to be concerned for."

Swain laughed shortly.

"You are foolish to speak so," he said.

"Why, Swain?" asked Snorri. "These monks cannot harm us."

"As to that, I am not so sure," replied

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* Isle of May.

Swain. "My judgment is that one of us should keep watch through the night."

Margad said that he would do so, but Swain answered that they could not trust him.

"I will remain awake as long as I am able," he said, "and then I will waken Snorri or one of his men."

This was agreed upon, and while the others slept Swain lay in the doorway to one of the rooms, with the curtain between him and the corridor. He had been here many moments when he heard the pattering of sandals and a voice, a quavering voice, spoke from the shadows of the corridor.

"Yes, yes, Brother Dugal, I know that the sea is rough, but you must go and fetch over the Earl of Fife and his men or these pirates will murder us all and plunder the monastery—and think what a scandal that would be! Moreover, Gilbride of Lindsey, who was here day before yesterday, told us that Swain was a rebel against his lord, and it is likely that Jarl Rognvald would bestow a notable gift upon our monastery did we secure Swain for him."

Swain bounded to his feet, sword in hand, and tossed the curtain aside.

"Not so fast, Prior Baldwin," he called. "You must catch me before you pickle me."

There was a scuffling of folk in flight, and he aroused his companions.

"To the landing-cove, Margad," he ordered first of all, "and see that no boat puts forth. The rest of us will make certain of the prior and the others."

And it is told that Margad discovered Brother Dugal and two lay serving men in the act of launching their boat and drove them back up the rocks. Swain and Snorri and those with them found the prior and the remainder of the monks immured in the chapel, and when they would not open to Swain's summons he smashed the door and burst in upon them.

"Mercy, Swain," clamored the prior. "We are monks; our deaths would be a mortal sin against you."

"I think little of that," returned Swain. "But where do you keep that incense?"

The prior looked at the windows and the shattered door, and listened to the roaring of the wind.

"We are lost!" he gasped. "Nobody can win to our aid upon such a night."

"That is true," assented Swain. "And where is the incense?"

The prior conducted him to a chest in the vestry and reluctantly raised the lid.

"I have only a score of packets," he said pleadingly. "You will not——"

Swain scooped them all into a sleeping-bag.

"That is unfortunate," he remarked. "Bishop William could have used much more of the stuff."

"Oh, blessed saints!" cried Prior Baldwin. "What a man! Have you no conscience?"

Swain peered around the vestry, which was dimly lighted by a stand of candles. Vestments, stiff with gold and silver embroidery and colored threads, hung upon the walls; in racks were handsome vessels employed in the services of the chapel. He threw up the lid of another chest—and pennies, merks, byzants and ducats tinkled and clinked under his hand.

"No, no," begged the prior. "That is the funds of our monastery. Without it we are doomed to starvation."

"I never heard of monks starving," rejoined Swain. "But I will make a bargain with you. What do you call that coat there?"

"It is a stole from Milano," answered the prior weeping.

"Well, you shall give me that, and the sparkling one beside it and that thing of bands—they are all very womanish; I cannot see what Bishop William, who was a warrior in his day, can do with such—and two of those gold cups, and that silver basin—yes, and the pitcher next it. Give me all those, and I will not take your money."

Prior Baldwin swallowed hard.

"It is robbery," he panted.

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"You are giving them to me," he said.

"Robbery," moaned the prior.

"It is not robbery to take from one priest to give to another," returned Swain. "Well, what do you say?"

"And will you go away from here?"

Swain inclined his ear to the gibbering of the storm; it seemed to be diminishing.

"Gladly," he assented. "I could never be sure of my life here if I slept."

"Take them," bleated the prior.

"You are sure that you give them quite freely?" pressed Swain. "Bishop William would not like to have gifts that were not free."

Prior Baldwin beat the air with his hands and fought for breath.

"Freely," he gasped. "Go!"

Swain rejoined Snorri and the others in the chapel with a bulging bag of loot, which the trader regarded suspiciously.

"I cannot afford to be known for a plunderer of monasteries in these parts, Swain," he objected.

"This is a free gift from the holy prior to Bishop William," answered Swain. "Is it not, Prior Baldwin?"

"Oh, that the swine of Gadara had not all perished in the sea!" gagged the prior. "Yes, yes, yes, Swain. I have said it."

"Say it again," commanded Swain.

"Free," said the prior. "Heaven forgive me! Yes, yes, free. And may the bishop gain little merit from it!"

"We are not concerned for the bishop's merit," said Swain placidly. "He is a good warrior, is Bishop William. By Thor's Hammer, but I would like to match him with this Pope I hear so much about. I will wager two gold arm-rings our bishop would hew him down!"

The prior raised his two hands in a gesture of hopeless and utter horror.

"Come," said Swain to Snorri, "the storm is moderating. Let us sail on for Edinburgh, for I must be rid of this Lack-wit Margad, and be about my own affairs in the Orkneyar."

X

AT EDINBURGH Snorri established Swain and Margad in a tavern which was kept by a man named Lifolf Magnus's son—he was out of Jala in the Hjaltlands and known favorably to all Norse folk who came to Scotland—and arranged with Lifolf that they should be supplied with ample funds for their wants, himself going surety for whatever Swain might spend. Then, having delivered the goods he had fetched from the Orkneys, he bade them farewell and sailed on south for Bretland after iron for Jarl Rognvald's smiths.

And as it chanced, that very night, as Margad and Swain were returning from an ale-drinking at the house of another Orkneyman, they were attracted by the clatter of swords in a broil in the long street which runs along the spine of the city like a causeway from the plain to the castle hill.

"There is fighting!" snorted Margad eagerly.

"Even you can tell that," agreed Swain. "But here is a chance to flesh our blades and show these Scots how we can carry ourselves."

"We will first see who is fighting," answered Swain.

He ran up the alley in which they had been climbing the ascent to the central street of the city, and at the juncture of another alley they came upon the combatants. One man was fighting with six.

"Ha," said Margad. "This is a simple matter. See, those six are unable to overcome the man alone. There, he has slashed off an arm of the little man in green. We will aid them, and then——"

Swain, watching the brawl with narrowed eyes, waved his comrade to silence. He stared from the five assailants to the single fighter, a lean, upstanding man whose rich surcoat evidently concealed a hauberk of chain-mail and whose agile sword guarded the head which was covered by no more than a cap of maintenance. No common man, this. He must be agreatnoble, at the least. Swain decided.

"We help the man alone," he said. "Come!"

"But, Swain——"

Swain leaped to the attack, sword out, and Margad followed him, dumbly concerned at the senselessness of joining the weaker side.

"Five to three is better than five to one," he muttered, "but seven to one would be best."

But he was not two steps behind Swain when his chief leaped into the adjoining alley, cut down one of the five attackers and arrayed himself beside the man in the surcoat that showed a lion rampant in gold upon its crimson silk.

"This is slow work," reflected Margad as he cut down a man in his turn. "Why take one at a time?"

And dropping his sword, he grasped the two assailants nearest to him, each by the scruff of the neck, up-ended them and drove their heads down upon the cobbles of the way. At the same time Swain hacked open the thigh of the one surviving of the six and the man in the gaudy surcoat finished the fellow with a thrust in the groin.

"*Pardi*, my friends!" exclaimed the warrior of the rampant lion. "You came to my help in the nick of my need. Well did my Lord Moray plot for this night, knowing there would be none within call to aid me. What lucky chance brought you here?"

He spoke in the dialect of Norman French which the Scots Lowland nobles shared with the English lords of alien extraction. Swain, who had ranged far and wide of the French coast, made shift to answer him in the same speech.

"We are of the Orkneys," he replied. "We were passing. That is all."

"It is not all for me," answered the stranger humorously. "By the realm, the man lives not who could have done more than this giant here—or you of the rusty beard, too. I shall not forget it."

"We are accustomed to greater odds," rejoined Swain carelessly.

"Ha, I have room for two such fighters," announced the lone fighter.

"I do not hire out my sword," said Swain.

The stranger eyed him amusedly.

"Perhaps I could persuade you."

"Who are you?" asked Swain.

"Who are you?" countered the stranger.

"I am called Swain Olaf's son."

"Of the Orkneys? Jarl Rognvald's chief? I have heard of you."

"That is more than I can say for you," said Swain coldly. "Are you ashamed of your name that you do not own it?"

The stranger laughed openly.

"My name is David," he said. "It is passing well-known—some men might say as well-known as yours, Swain."

"I hear you say as much," commented Swain. "Whose man are you?"

"My own."

"Yes, yes." There was impatience in Swain's tones. "But who do you serve? Who is your lord? What lands do you hold?"

"Scotland."

"Scotland." Swain blinked. "You are the king?"

"I am."

"And how comes it that you wander alone and defenseless at night?"

"I was tricked from the castle by a lord who hates me. If you had not come along——"

The king shrugged his shoulders and wiped his bloody sword on the coat of one of the dead men at his feet.

"A man who takes such risks does not deserve to be king," said Swain disgustedly.

"I have heard that you take risks, Swain," replied King David, smiling.

"And I escape them."

"True. With that giant beside you you might defy an army."

It was Swain's turn to laugh.

"He has no wits in his head, Lord King. I or another must think for him. If I trusted to him when I was in danger I should lose my life every day."

The king stared at the two reflectively. Several startled citizens, who had opened shutters to peer out at the fighting, had elected the path of caution and withdrew. The streets were deserted. The three stood alone amongst the six corpses they severally had made.

"You are not one to sweeten your words, Swain," remarked the king.

"I am not," Swain admitted.

"Then are you no man for court or king's house. How fare you with your Jarl?"

"We disagree when needs we must," said Swain, not desiring to state too much.

The king chuckled.

"To the extent of fleeing his wrath. Yes, Swain, so much has come to my ears."

"If you have heard the truth," answered Swain stiffly, "you know that I fled to save from the Jarl's wrath the head of this Lackwit here."

"And why did you so?" queried the king.

"Because I might not honorably suffer my man to die for doing what he did in my behalf, although mistakenly."

"But he is a good man?"

"None better."

"And cannot return to the Orkneys?"

The king slapped his leg, and laughed again as Swain nodded assent.

"Here is a decree from Providence," he pronounced. "You two are in exile. I need a canny brain and a strong arm about the throne—for I will take a risk, even as you do, Swain, and chance your being more amenable than you seem. Come with me, and I will make you both powerful and rich."

"Margad, here, you may have," answered Swain; "but I am Orkney born, and in Orkney shall I live and die."

"But you are rebel against your lord!"

"I suspect Jarl Rognvald will say nothing when I return."

The king turned haughty.

"I have not offered many men what I offer you, Swain—lands, men to lead, a rich wife——"

"That last would be enough to dissuade me," observed Swain. "I am no wife-taker."

The king's haughtiness dissolved in chuckles.

"I see that you are as peculiar a man as you have been described to me," he said. "But if you will not come, you will not."

"That is it, Lord King."

"And there is nothing I can do for you?"

Swain thought a moment.

"You might write to Jarl Rognvald and tell him that you have made me the offer I declined," he decided. "It will serve to remind the Jarl that he is not the only lord I can aid if I choose."

"But you will serve no other!" pointed out the king. "You have said so."

"I serve no lord, unless it pleases me," retorted Swain. "I fight for my own hand. A king or a Jarl has his purpose at times, but if they inconvenience me I can get along without them."

The king roared with laughter.

"What a man! I should have much joy of your company, Swain—as, also, much pain, I expect. Well, well, I will do as you ask, and what is more, I will suggest to Jarl Rognvald that he made a friend of you."

"I am friends with any man who does not oppose my will," replied Swain.

"And that, too, I do not doubt," exclaimed the king. "But what of the silent giant here? Will he refuse to serve me likewise?"

Margad dug in the mud of the kennel with the tip of his scabbard.

"Why, that is for Swain to say," he mumbled at length, seeing that an answer was required of him.

"Does Swain decide for you?" demanded King David.

"I am his man, Lord King," answered Margad.

"And you do as he bids?"

"Always, Lord King."

"No matter what he bids you do?"

"No matter, Lord King." And Margad waxed confidential as his sluggish wits recalled a recent episode. "Why, it was only a short while gone I was all for lending our swords to the men who set upon you, seeing that they were six and you one—and it still seems to me that would have been the most sensible thing to do—but Swain said no, and I did not."

The king laughed long and loud.

"I perceive that you are as honest as you are stupid," he said. "And if Swain allows you to become my man, will you engage never to think for yourself, but to hold your sword and your muscles always at my command?"

Margad eyed Swain uneasily.

"He will," responded Swain grimly.

"I will, Lord King," echoed Margad.

"That is excellent," cried the king. "You shall be the captain of the men-at-arms of my bodyguard. And now do the two of you come with me to the castle. For Swain shall be the king's guest, after saving the king's life."

"I have no objection," answered Swain. "A castle is more comfortable than a tavern."

XI

KING DAVID performed his promise to Swain by sending an embassy of two clerks to Jarl Rognvald, extending the Jarl congratulations upon his acquiring possession of the Orkneyar and concluding in this manner:

> We take this opportunity of acquainting your lordship that we are deeply in debt to Swain Olaf's son of Gairsey, who is now visiting us at our castle of Edinburgh. Swain's fortune is dear to our royal heart, and inasmuch as he has refused all honors and rewards we have offered him in Scotland we hope that your lordship will see fit to extend him a greeting in proportion to his merits when he returns to your dominions.

For a month longer Swain sojourned with the king, assisting Margad in the organizing of a bodyguard that would be proof against the corruption and jealousy of the great nobles, who in Scotland fought continually amongst themselves and even against the king. Then, when King David invited him to accompany the Court to Sterling for the deer-hunting in the near-by forests, Swain announced that he must take his departure, and would not be dissuaded whatever arguments the king used. Nor, it must be said, were the lords of the court loath to see him go, for they hated him for his place with the king and the contempt he showed toward themselves.

He journeyed by land through Fife and Atjoklar* to Apardion† in the north, and there he procured a small boat in which he sailed up the east coast to Caithness, and no man in the north was aware of his coming. He beached his boat at Vik an hour past candle-lighting, tossed over his shoulder the bag which contained his presents for Bishop William and loosened in its sheath the golden-hilted sword which the king had given him. And then he ascended the shore to the *skalli* of Gutorm Hroald's son.

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*Athol. †Aberdeen.

Many lights were burning in the stead-buildings, and folk passed to and fro.

"What is toward?" Swain asked gruffly of a serving-man.

"Gutorm drinks ale with his friends," answered the varlet.

"Here is a thirsty man, if not a friend," said Swain.

And he walked unannounced through the *skalli* door.

Gutorm was a young man of good stature, blond as Swain's self, and very vain of his prowess and the wealth he had inherited from his father, whose estate had matched Swain's or any other in Caithness. He was talking with his guests as Swain entered, and when he first noticed the visitor he did not realize who it was; but the comprehension that Swain had crossed his threshold brought him to his feet, with his hands fumbling for the sword that was hung upon the back of his chair.

"What do you here?" he demanded.

And for an instant he and those with him looked fearfully toward the door, expecting an in-flood of Swain's people.

"I am weary with travel and I stopped here for rest and food," answered Swain coolly.

"Are you alone?"

"How else?"

Self-assurance regained possession of Gutorm.

"You must be mad," he cried scornfully.

"Not I," rejoined Swain.

"You are my enemy! My father's blood is on your hands."

"It was not I who slew your father, nor was he slain by my wish."

Gutorm laughed evilly.

"Tell that tale otherwhere! All men know that you bade Margad slay my father."

"Nevertheless, I did not," answered Swain, "and my presence here is the proof of my innocence."

"It is the surety of your punishment," shouted Gutorm. "What Jarl Rognvald could not do, I will."

"Harsh words," said Swain, with an undercurrent of mockery. "And, some men may hold, empty."

Gutorm motioned to those in the *skalli* hall.

"Seize him, friends. I will hew off his head, myself."

Swain started back, as if in surprize and bewilderment.

"Would you harm an innocent man, weatherworn and weary?"

"Seize him!" repeated Gutorm.

But the folk in the hall hesitated. Swain was reputed far and wide for his savage ferocity and the guile which went hand-in-hand with mighty strength and weapon-skill.

"My blood be on your head," he said now, and again there was that undercurrent of baffling mockery.

Gutorm snatched his sword from its sheath, and vaulted the table to the *skalli* floor.

"I'll have his head, alone, if you fear him," he shouted.

"He must have his house-carls without," clamored one man.

"Beware of him, Gutorm," advised a second.

"Swain would never risk himself without calculation," proclaimed a third.

But Gutorm ran forward heedlessly. And how it happened no man there present afterward might say, but Swain's sword flashed from its sheath in one vast sweep that carried Gutorm's head across the hall from his severed neck.

"I call all men to bear witness Gutorm took arms against me in his own hall," shouted Swain.

Then he spun on his heel, his bag still slung over his shoulder and cleared himself a path to the door by one swing of his dripping blade.

"Room!" he cried, and they shrank aside.

In the next breath he was out of the door and running to his boat. Behind him rose a huge shouting, with waving of torches and weaving of distracted folk to and fro. But none thought to go to the beach, and Swain shoved off undisturbed and steered north to clear the heel of Caithness and the rugged mass of Rognvaldsey.

He sailed through the night, retracing the course he had followed on his way from Gairsey to Dungelsbae, but instead of heading in under Hjalpandisey for the Aurrida Firth, he bore off northwest, rounded the point of Gja and shaped a course for Egilsey, the Holy Isle, where Bishop William was accustomed to dwell.

Here he moored his boat in the cove beside the barges the monks used in passing back and forth between the islands, and with his bag upon his back climbed the shore to the gate.

"Is Bishop William within?" he asked the porter. "Then tell him Swain has fetched the incense and certain other matters."

The porter returned immediately, and ushered Swain into the simple chamber which served the old churchman as library, bed-room and refectory. The bishop was seated at a table loaded with parchments, books, records and communications with Rome.

"So you are back, Swain?" he greeted his cousin. "And what says Jarl Rognvald?"

"I have yet to see the Jarl," said Swain; "but I came to you first to deliver a small matter of some incense and other tricksome things which may be of use to you in your work."

And he emptied the bag upon the bishop's table.

"There are only twenty packets of the——"

"But where got you all this gear?" exclaimed the bishop.

A stern look crept into the old features.

"I trust you murdered no holy man to win me such a gift."

"Oh, as to that," replied Swain, "it is a present for you from Prior Baldwin of Maeyjar."

The bishop knitted his brows.

"A present? Are you sure?"

"Snorri Sigurd's son heard him give them to me. Yes, and I asked him twice or more before Snorri if he gave them freely, and he said, 'Yes.' "

The bishop's lips twitched slightly.

"I doubt it not, Swain. Humph! It is a noble gift. I must write to the holy Baldwin and acknowledge it—as, also, your share in transporting it hither. Was this all your purpose in coming? What have you done since I saw you—aside, that is, from defying the Jarl?"

"I have attended to all that I had to do," answered Swain. "As you know, I punished Hakon Klo and saved Margad from the Jarl's wrath."

"With some slight assistance from me, on that last count," added the bishop tartly.

"Why, that is the truth," admitted Swain. "And I shall not forget it."

"That is to be seen," remarked Bishop William. "And what have you been doing since you and Margad fled from Lambaborg!"

"I went to Scotland and secured Margad an honorable position with the Scots king."

"Yes," murmured the bishop. "It comes to my mind that I heard of a letter concerning you the Jarl had received from King David."

"What said the Jarl?" asked Swain.

"That Swain falls always on his feet."

"The future must prove that," said Swain. And as an afterthought, he continued—

"On my way hither I slew Gutorm Hroald's son."

The bishop started.

"You celebrate your return to the islands—from which you fled to escape the Jarl's wrath—by slaying the man you are at law with! This is a sorry course, Swain!"

"Oh, I slew him in self-defense," said Swain. "I asked him for hospitality and——"

The bishop bent forward in his chair beneath the burden of his laughter.

"You—you—went to Gutorm for hospitality? To your enemy, whose father you——"

"I did not slay Hroald," Swain broke in.

"No, but you——"

And the bishop burst out laughing afresh.

"He violated the laws of hospitality when he drew sword against me," insisted Swain. "He shouted to his people to fall upon me. I barely escaped him."

"Yet it was necessary to slay him!" commented Bishop William.

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"It was his life or mine—and I had asked him for food and lodging."

The bishop nodded, his soberness regained.

"It was cleverly designed, Swain. But I know not if the Jarl will see it in that light. What will you have me do?"

"I am for Orphir," replied Swain promptly. "Perhaps you have occasion to fare that way, Father Bishop."

Bishop William weighed one of the silver utensils on the table before him, fingered the embroidered copes and stoles and sniffed of the incense.

"What a blessed perfume!" he murmured. "I have smelled the same in the Holy Father's chapel in Rome. Well, well, Swain, it might be advisable for me to accompany you to Orphir and remind the Jarl that he is backward in his payments toward the new minister at Kirkiuvag. When I tell him of the noble gifts you have procured me I doubt not his generosity will be stirred anew."

XII

JARL ROGNVALD stamped out of his *skalli* door as Swain and Bishop William climbed the hill from the landing beach of Orphir.

"You go with blood upon your hands, Swain, and you return with blood upon them," he called. "You are in ill company, Father Bishop. Here have I this minute had word that Swain has added to his other crimes the slaying of Gutorm Hroald's son."

"Swain has his own story concerning that, Jarl Rognvald," replied Bishop William.

"Swain can explain any deed," retorted the Jarl. "Or find a king to do it for him."

"What have they told you, Lord Jarl?" asked Swain.

"Told me?" rasped the Jarl. "They have told me that you came to Vik by night and slew Gutorm as he rose from his table."

"Did they say I was alone?"

"No, no, they said naught of that."

"Did they say I slew him unfairly?"

"What has that——"

"Did they say I attacked him?" insisted Swain.

The Jarl looked around him uncomfortably.

"Ho, carls, where is that fellow that came from Vik?"

There was a boiling in the group of men by the *skalli*, and one of Gutorm's friends—his name was Brusi Amundi's son—who had been in the *skalli* at Vik the night Swain entered it was thrust to the front.

"Here, Brusi," commanded the Jarl, "do you repeat to Swain what you told me."

And as the man bent his head and wiggled unhappily, the Jarl snarled:

"Why must you fear him? I am here, and truly, I may yet say that Swain has not slain an enemy wantonly in my presence!"

"Tell the Jarl what occurred, Brusi," said Swain. "There is naught of which I have cause to be ashamed."

"The saints help us!" exclaimed the Jarl sarcastically.

"May your prayer be answered!" Bishop William approved piously.

Brusi looked from one to the other of them, and gradually recovered a portion of his courage.

"If it please you, Lord Jarl, and you, too, Father Bishop," he began, "we were sitting to the ale-drinking, and it was dark outside. And then very suddenly there was a draught of cold air as the door was opened, and there was Swain."

"Alone?" asked Jarl Rognvald.

"There was none other with him then," replied Brusi unwillingly.

"Did you find trace of others with me?" inquired Swain.

"No."

"And what happened next?" prompted the Jarl.

"Swain——"

And Brusi halted abruptly with his mouth open.

"Yes, yes," said the Jarl. "Go on, man. What did he do—rush at you?"

Swain's icy-blue eyes bored into Brusi's lowering face.

"Tell the truth," he said softly.

Bishop William plucked at the beads which hung from his girdle.

"Oh, by all means, tell the truth, Brusi," he admonished.

"He said he was weary," answered Brusi, more unwillingly than ever.

"And what else?" demanded the Jarl.

"He was hungry."

A twinkle lightened the severity of the Jarl's features.

"Ho, ho, Swain," he said. "I might have known you would prepare carefully what you did."

"I strive to act carefully in all that I do, Lord Jarl," replied Swain. "But let Brusi continue."

"There is little more," said Brusi with a show of defiance. "Gutorm said that Swain was his enemy and had been the means of his father's death, and this Swain denied and claimed hospitality, and so—and so—they fought."

"Oh, they fought?" said Jarl Rognvald. "I thought Swain slew him without fighting."

"It is true that he did not strike a blow," put in Swain, "for when he rushed at me I struck so quickly that his head was off before his sword could fall."

"That is true," cried Brusi involuntarily.

Jarl Rognvald hooked his thumbs in his sword-belt and the twinkle in his eyes became a smile.

"Here is such a problem as only Swain could set me," he exclaimed. "It is true enough that he did not slay Hroald, and as I hear more of what passed I am inclined to believe that he did not instruct Margad to slay Hroald either. But having supported Margad in what he did, and then aided him to slay Hakon Klo, who was Gutorm's brother-in-law, Swain returns from Scotland and visits Gutorm in his own *skalli*, as if no trouble had ever existed between them. Could you not have done aught else, Swain?"

"It was late, and I was weary with travel," responded Swain.

"I doubt it not," returned the Jarl dryly, "but not too weary to slay Gutorm. However, what is done can not be mended. It appears that you were not the aggressor, and the most I can judge against you is that you pay fair man-bote——"

"If Gutorm had left son or brother I would gladly pay man-bote, Lord Jarl," returned Swain, "but I ask you to remember that his estate must be divided amongst his cousins, and it is not right that I——"

"I think," interceded Bishop William smoothly, "that Swain has made ample amends for whatever blame attaches to him for Gutorm's death, Lord Jarl. He has been the means of procuring a most handsome gift to Holy Church, which will go far to equipping the minster we shall build at Kirkiuvag as speedily as you complete the payments you have promised toward it."

Jarl Rognvald's expression became comically crestfallen.

"By the blessed *Magnus*, Father Bishop," he protested, "you are at me from month to month! Is my purse never to have a rest?"

"You vowed a vow, Lord Jarl," returned the bishop, "to be the means of rearing us a suitable minster. If you keep peace in the Islands money will flow speedily into your coffers. Why, Swain alone can earn you a handsome income by his viking cruises, if all goes well."

"Yes, if all goes well," growled the Jarl. "But it has not. Here has Swain been setting the land by the ears ever since I came into power."

"All I have done has been to claim my just rights, Lord Jarl," replied Swain. "And it is no fault of mine if wicked men have told you false tales about me."

"Who told you that I had heard false tales about you?" snapped the Jarl.

"You have believed ill of me," said Swain. "And when I asked you for justice in the matter of the Borgadale lands you would not heed me."

The Jarl blew through his nose in a way he had when he was puzzled.

"But what of the Borgadale lands now?" he exclaimed. "Hroald and Gutorm are dead, and Hakon Klo who farmed them."

"Manifestly, Swain is the rightful owner," said Bishop William gently. "Here has been an ordeal by battle."

The Jarl laughed out so lustily that men on the hills toward Skapa heard him and looked down at the village.

"Leave an issue to Swain and he will dispose of it," he said. "He has made a clean sweep of his opponents. I can not very well give the Borgadale farm to Gutorm's cousins, who will probably quarrel among themselves over the properties at Vik. Well, well, it shall be as he wills. I adjudge the lands to you, Swain; but what return will you make me?"

"I will go Autumn viking, Lord Jarl," replied Swain, "and win you enough booty to aid Bishop William as he wishes."

"And thereby serve the bishop as well as me," commented the Jarl. "I see I must take you as I find you, Swain. After all, as I have said before, what is a Jarl to you? I am lucky, indeed, that you suffer me to retain possession of my title."

But this was the last time there was trouble between Jarl Rognvald and Swain Olaf's son, and as the time passed the Jarl grew to regard his quarrel with Swain as a great joke and would tell it at his own expense when he sat at the ale-drinking. But Swain would never permit Margad to return to the Orkneys, even after Jarl Rognvald bade him do so.

"No, no," Swain would say, "the most fortunate thing I ever did was to rid myself of that Lack-wit. The wisest man can be helpless when he has a fool by him."

GOING HOME!

by JOHN WEBB

Author of "The Job," "Seamen All," etc.

THE army officers from Fort Randolph were holding a ball at the Washington Hotel. The ballroom and porticos of the hotel were ablaze with light; a long line of automobiles and horse-drawn cabs waited against the curb outside the grounds. The two broad, columned porticos of the hotel, one on each side, one facing Colon and the other facing the harbor and the Caribbean Sea, were crowded with laughing people.

There were army people from Gatun and Fort Randolph, exclusive, superior folk who kept mostly to themselves; hard-working Zone department heads and their wives from Cristobal and Gatun, an easy-going, good-natured set who gossiped aloud and called "secrets" to friends twenty feet away; and, lastly, greatly in the minority, immaculate, sleek-haired, suave Panamanian gentlemen and their ladies from Colon. Between dances they crowded to the seaward portico and sat in the cool, steady breeze that came laden with the scent of the tropics.

The last strains of a dreamy waltz floated from the ball-room to where Captain "One-Two" Mac—Captain John McGuire of the freighter *Hawk*—sat in a chair on the farthest end of the seaward portico. He rose slowly, shoved his limp Monte Cristi hat to the back of his head, descended to the ground, and strolled between rows of towering royal-palms to the harbor's edge, where he leaned against the sea-wall and gazed off to sea.

Captain Mac did not like crowds—or rather, he did not like the uncomfortable feeling which they gave him; for he was not a "good fellow." He did not mix well. He had friends, yes, but they were sailor friends, here today and gone tomorrow, perhaps never to be seen again, leaving behind them only memories. He was lonesome, this little man, very lonesome; but crowds scared him, embarrassed him, made him feel more alone than ever. He was small of stature, slender, not imposing; he felt lost, smothered in a crowd. He was low-voiced, slow of speech, thoughtful; the easy, meaningless repartee of more nimble-witted ones left him stranded, made him feel out of place; so he preferred to stand apart and be silent.

He stood thus now, with his hat in his hand and his close-cropped black hair ruffled by the breeze. The palm-fronds rustled as the tall trees bent to the wind. The moon laid down a silvery "path to Spain" across the rippling surface of the harbor. Great swells thundered upon the breakwater, two miles out, and the sound of it came to the little man standing alone by the sea-wall. He rolled and lighted a cigaret in the lee of the wall; and as he puffed away at it, a contented expression came to the lean face and the somber eyes; for, in his own way, Captain Mac was happy. And yet this quiet, retiring, solitary, middle-aged man who was afraid of people—this man was a noted sea bucko! Men who knew called him the "Stormy

Petrel." And many, hating him, called him other things.

He heard voices behind him, but did not turn. The voices came closer, and he edged nearer the sea-wall so as not to block the narrow path. And then he received a blow on the back that sent the cigaret flying from his mouth and caused his teeth to come together with a click. He spun about and his right fist flashed up in a short arc, but he caught himself before it landed, and stepped back, mild surprize upon his face.

Before him stood two men. One, a big mahogany-faced, powerful-looking man, was grinning broadly and holding out his hand. The other, a tall Panamanian in white duck, was standing to one side as if waiting to be introduced.

"Hello, Cap'n One-Two Mac," said the big man, in a booming voice. "Shake, you old pirate."

"You big ox," said Captain Mac.

He pulled his tie from under one ear and straightened his coat; then a twinkle came to his black eyes and he gripped hands with the other.

"Hello, Bill Cady."

"I'm homeward-bound, Cap'n Mac—homeward-bound!"

He raised his hand as if to slap the captain on the back again, but the little man sprang away.

"I'll pop you on the chin if you do," he said.

"Well, darn it, I feel good. I'm going home! Tell you about it later. Here—" Cady drew the tall Panamanian forward—"you two shake. Cap'n Mac—John Avilez."

Avilez flashed two rows of even, white teeth in a quick smile, and bowed low; then he held out his hand.

"*Juan* Avilez," he said. "I have heard of you, Captain McGuire. I am pleased."

Captain Mac nodded and shook hands silently.

"He's a good friend o' mine, John is," said Cady. "Ain't you, John?"

Avilez again flashed his dazzling smile.

"We are friends," he said simply.

"When I'm in Panama, I always look up John," said Cady. "When I get settled in the States, he's going to spend a couple o' months with me every once in a while. He's got to make out a statement before a notary to that effect."

He grinned broadly.

"So you're going home," mused Captain Mac. "For good?"

"Y'betcha. Gosh, ain't it time? D'you know I'm getting on to fifty years of age. Look here——"

He took off his wide-brimmed gray felt hat and bowed his head to show his hair.

"I'm all gray. I'm getting old, Cap'n Mac—and I want to go home, to see the old folks. They're both in the seventies now. And I haven't been home for over twelve years."

He shook his head and gazed seaward, toward the north.

Captain Mac and Avilez exchanged glances of understanding. When one of those vagabonds who spend their lives wandering over the earth becomes homesick, his condition is pitiable.

"Yes, I'm going home—to stay."

The big man's rugged brown features broke into a wistful smile.

"I'm just plain homesick—and darn it, I've been that way for thirty years. I'll tell you how come."

HE TOLD his story simply, pausing now and then to meditate.

His home was in Maryland. He had left home to "make his fortune," at the age of eighteen. He went from coast to coast of the United States, and then deciding that Fortune lay farther abroad, worked his way to Central America, and then to South America. Still Fortune eluded him, and he sailed for Australia. There he was lucky—"lucky" is the word—and after being there three years, he sailed for San Francisco with considerable money in his pocket. But on the ship he became acquainted with two "tourists," and the "tourists" suggested they play a "friendly game of cards to while away the time," and Cady's lucky money quickly transferred its allegiance to the "tourists." He arrived at San Francisco with barely enough money to pay for his ticket to Maryland.

Here Cady relighted a stub of cigar he had been holding in his hand and perched himself upon the sea-wall.

"I've got a cousin in Maryland," he said, continuing, "who likes to prophesy ill-fortune for everybody, and he gloats when he happens to be right and somebody goes to jail or the poorhouse. When I went away he said I'd come back looking for something to eat, broke. Well, when I got off the train at Severn—that's where my people live—who should be standing on the station platform but Alfred, this smug-faced little rat who said I'd come home broke. He walked with me for a ways, and he mentioned 'casually' that he was agent in that county for a big farming machinery company and making plenty of money; and then he asks me—'Broke?' He had a nasty smile on his face, and I felt like smacking him in the teeth; but I didn't and said: 'Nope—not quite.' And I tried to smile. I had two dollars in my pocket. I saw right then I'd never be able to stay in Severn with him laughing up his sleeve at me, so I said good-by the next day and worked my way to Charleston in a lumber schooner.

"The next time I started home I'd been three years in a whaler and had quite a stake. Darned if I wasn't held up in Boston and robbed of every nickel! I rode the blinds to Baltimore and signed on one of the old Johnson Line cattle-boats for Liverpool. Another time, in Norfolk, I bought a two-masted schooner, thought I'd go home in style, 'cap'n of my own ship,' but when I went down to take the schooner, I found that the guy I'd paid my money to hadn't owned it. Never saw him again. I'm kind of stupid sometimes, you know."

He smiled ruefully.

"And that's the way it went, for almost twenty years. Luck was always with me when it come to making money, but she left me flat when it come to holding on to it. Last time I was home, Alfred told me he'd been made general sales manager for the state. Said it like he was president of a bank and director of ten or twelve more. He asked me if I wanted to borrow a couple of dollars to get out of town with. I smacked him for that; and old Judge Aimes stuck a ten-dollar fine on me for it—but it was worth it. I had a dollar and sixty cents left. I made up my mind I'd go away and come back with more money than Alfred had ever heard of. I stowed away on a ship and got to Cartagena. From there I went inland.

"At that time the Colombian cattle business was beginning to pick up speed, and I got a job as assistant overseer on one of the biggest ranches in the district. I decided I'd give Luck a kick in the face and depend on nothing but hard work. I stuck to the job and saved my money. The owner of the place, a Colombian named Hendrigues, liked me, and when the overseer got drunk and drowned himself in a well, I was made overseer. Soon I had a chance to buy a bit of land myself, and Hendrigues stocked it for me on my note. I made good in a hurry, and I was soon able to pay off my note and branch out a bit. All this time I was working like a longshoreman—and homesick as ——. I kept that place nine years, all the time buying more land and increasing my stock.

"A while ago I got an offer for the place, from a rich Panamanian named Ferdanque—Felipe Ferdanque. He is a doctor, and lives here in Colon. He didn't offer me what the place was worth, but—well, I wanted to get home. The old folks had been writing to me pretty regular and, by reading between the lines, I knew they were having kind of a tough time of it themselves. They always were poor and they're poorer now than ever. I thought it would be kind of nice to blow into town with a lot of money and make things easy for them. So I wrote to Ferdanque and told him, Yes, I'd sell. I came on to Colon—and three hours ago I got his check and signed everything, land, stock and buildings, over to him. Tomorrow afternoon I'm sailing on a fruit boat—for home."

Cady puffed his cigar aglow and gazed again toward the north.

"I'll cash the check in the morning," he said at length; "and when I get home I'm going to buy a nice, quiet little business and settle down to sell groceries or some such thing over a counter. I'm going to sit on my old man's porch, put my feet on the rail, and watch the freight-trains rumble by. I used to like to watch 'em when I was a kid. There was one red-headed freight-conductor who used to always give me a wave as he passed. He'd be sitting on the back platform of the caboose with a corncob pipe between his teeth; and he always had a black shirt with yellow arm-bands and a brown slouch hat. I used to think he had the best job in the United States. Gee, I can see that geezer now. Wonder if he's still there."

Cady grinned and ran his thick fingers through his bristly gray hair.

"Home, Cap'n Mac—going home!"

He slapped the little captain soundly upon the back, and laughed so loudly that the people on the hotel portico looked curiously toward the three dark shapes standing by the sea-wall.

"You'd better cash your check before you shout," spoke up Captain Mac. "Doctor Ferdanque is——"

He paused and looked at Avilez.

Avilez nodded. His smile disappeared and his face became hard.

"Doctor Ferdanque is not an honest man," he said. "He is a *médico de apelación*—what you call a quack doctor. He is also a dishonest politician. He surrounds himself with thieves and liars and has a prize-fighter for a bodyguard. He is rich. He has influence. He has a great deal of property, most of which he acquired by tricks and unfair business deals. He disgraces his country. He and I are—not friends. No."

The tall Panamanian's lips tightened and his eyes glinted with a peculiar light.

"Well, what's the difference?" said Cady easily. "He can't jip me. A check is as good as cash. He has my receipt and I have his check. We're square."

He smiled and puffed happily at his cigar.

"I sincerely hope so," said Avilez, and Captain Mac nodded.

The ball was coming to an end. The crowd on the seaward portico was thinning and from the other side of the hotel came the sound of automobile horns and cab bells. Some of the invited guests were strolling in the hotel grounds before leaving for their homes.

A short, fat, pasty-faced Panamanian, on his arm a handsome, bejeweled woman, came slowly along the path by the sea-wall. They passed within a few paces of Cady and his friends, and a slow, thoughtful smile came to the fat man's face as he raised his hat, bowed, and passed on. A big negro with square jaws and bulging brows sauntered importantly a few yards in the rear.

"Doctor and Madam Ferdanque," said Avilez as the two passed, in a low voice, "and—" indicating the negro—"Jim Meigs, heavyweight champion of Central and South America. A stupid animal, Meigs, an excellent ditch-digger gone wrong."

Ferdanque halted a short distance away and called Meigs to him, and spoke to him in a low tone. The two looked back toward the sea-wall, then they resumed their stroll and disappeared in the shadows thrown by the bending palms.

Cady slipped from the wall and stood for a moment gazing at the spray-splashed breakwater on the other side of the harbor.

"This time tomorrow," he said slowly, "I'll be nearly a hundred miles the other side of that."

His laugh rang out and sailed off on the wind.

"Well—" Cady stretched lazily. "You fellows staying here at the hotel?"

Captain Mac and Avilez nodded, and the three walked toward the hotel.

"I'm staying at the Imperial," said Cady. "I'm going to say good night to you; I'm sleepy, and I've some writing to do before I go to bed. See you first thing in the morning. And I want you fellows to see me off for home tomorrow afternoon. G'night, Cap'n Mac; g'night, John."

He shook hands with them and strode off in the direction of the gate that opened upon Colon Beach. Once he turned, grinned back at them and waved his hand, then his burly form was blotted out by the gloom.

"A happy man," said Avilez, smiling.

"Happy," agreed Captain Mac.

Together they walked to the hotel and chose seats on the now vacant portico. Avilez accepted Captain Mac's offer of the "makings" and the two sat out a "good night" cigaret. Avilez talked, intelligently and interestingly, but the taciturn little sea-captain said little.

At length Captain Mac arose, tossed away his cigaret stub, looked at his watch.

"Midnight," he said.

Avilez arose, and they both turned to enter the hotel.

"Hey—wait a minute!" called a booming voice from out of the darkness. "It's happened again—I was robbed!"

CADY came running toward them. He was hatless and there was a trickle of blood on his cheek. The lining of his coat hung loose upon one side and there was mud upon his trousers at the knees.

His face was grim, but as he gained the portico he smiled weakly.

"Not so bad," he panted. "I only had twelve dollars with me, and the check—which of course is worthless to anybody but me."

Avilez started.

"Tell us about it," he said quickly.

"It happened right outside the gate. I was going to walk along the beach a ways and then cut in toward Bolivar Street. I had just crossed the street when I heard somebody coming along behind me. I didn't pay any attention at first, but started to turn the corner by the colored church, then I half-turned to see who it was. And then something hit me on the head and nearly knocked me flat. I guess when I turned I kind of spoiled his aim, otherwise he'd have put me out. I grappled with him and got in a couple of short-arm jolts, then he hit me again with whatever it was he had in his hand, either a blackjack or a short piece of pipe. I went to my knees then, and he hit me again and I fell on my face. When I woke up he'd gone, and so had every thing I'd had in my pockets. I've most of my cash, about two hundred dollars, in the safe at the Imperial."

"Did you tell the police?" asked Avilez.

"Yes; I met a native policeman on the way here—but I might just as well have told the man in the moon."

"Did you see the face of the man that robbed you?"

"Not clearly; I was too close to him. He was a black man though, I saw that much."

"A big man?"

"Yes; and a powerful lad, too."

"H'mm," murmured Captain Mac.

He half-closed his eyes and reached for the makings in his pocket.

Avilez glanced at Captain Mac, then fell to studying his finger-nails with thoughtful eyes.

"First thing in the morning," said Cady, "I'll call up Ferdanque and have him stop the check——"

"Call him up now," said Captain Mac sharply.

"Now? Why, it's one o'clock in the morning."

"No matter—call him up."

"Yes, call him up now," said Avilez. "I agree with the captain."

The tall Panamanian was not smiling now; his face was very serious and there was an angry light in his eyes.

Cady puzzled over it for a moment, then he entered the hotel lobby and went to the telephone at the desk. Captain Mac and Avilez resumed their seats on the portico and sat waiting, silently. Captain Mac's cigaret glowed fiercely and his lips had drawn into a thin, crooked smile. He spread his hands palms down upon his knees and stared at the long, strong fingers and the sharp, protruding knuckles crisscrossed by many scars. They were the hands of a fighting man. He opened and closed them reflectively; his nostrils twitched and his smile became more sardonic.

Avilez touched Captain Mac lightly on the arm and, when the little man looked up, pointed into the lobby. Captain Mac sprang from his chair, ran into the hotel and through the lobby, and caught Cady by the arm as he was about to pass out the door at the other side.

"Let go!" snarled Cady.

He swung about savagely, whirling the little sea-captain clear of the floor and almost freeing himself of the powerful hand that gripped him.

"Sit down, you fool!" snapped the captain, and he tried to draw the big man to a chair.

Avilez came up and took Cady's other arm, tried to hold him, but the big man tore himself away.

"Let go me," said Cady hotly, turning on Avilez. "I might have known better than to try to do honest business in a country full of thieving banana pedlers. Beat it!"

He struck Avilez heavily upon the mouth with his open hand.

The tall Panamanian staggered back He caught himself, straightened, and stood for a moment gazing at Cady; then he swept off his hat and bowed low.

"I beg your pardon, *señor*," he said, and walked off with an air of calm dignity.

"You rotter," shot out the captain, shoving Cady from him. He turned his back on the big man and strode after Avilez.

For a full minute Cady stood where they had left him. His face was haggard; there was a hopeless look in his eyes and his mouth drooped at the corners. He wavered uncertainly, as though not able to decide whether to leave or reënter the hotel. The night-clerk and a sleepy-eyed bell-boy watched him curiously from the desk.

Cady suddenly straightened his shoulders and marched back through the lobby to the seaward portico.

Captain Mac and Avilez were standing together a short distance from the door. The captain's inevitable cigaret was in the making and the Panamanian was dabbing gently at his lips with a white silk handkerchief.

Cady went straight to the latter.

"Forgive me, John," he said. "You know what a —— fool I am sometimes."

For a few seconds Avilez remained silent and motionless, then his teeth flashed in a smile that lighted up his countenance. He held out his hand.

"I am glad, my friend," he said. "It was done in the heat of anger. It is forgotten."

"I'm a rotter," said Cady, clasping the other's hand, "like Captain Mac said——"

"It is forgotten," repeated Avilez.

"And you, too, Captain Mac," said Cady. "I know you were trying to keep me out of trouble——"

"Where were you going?" asked the little man, cutting him short.

Cady's face clouded and he half-turned away.

"I was going to kill Ferdanque," he said. "And I haven't changed my mind."

"Well, before you go to jail," said Captain Mac, "tell us what it's all about."

"It's about my thirty thousand dollars. Ferdanque says he doesn't know anything about a check; says he paid me in cash."

"You would not have carried thirty thousand dollars about with you," remarked Avilez. "You would have put it in the Imperial's safe."

"Of course."

"So he gave you a check." Avilez elevated his eyebrows and looked at Cady with an expression that said as plain as words, "Do you understand?"

"Oh, I savvy that now," said Cady. "He said that the bank will affirm that he drew the money yesterday morning."

"I know every cent Doctor Ferdanque has drawn or deposited in the last five years," said Avilez. "He did draw thirty thousand dollars yesterday morning—in fact, I have the number of every bill."

Captain Mac and Cady, surprized, stared at the tall Panamanian.

"I told you we are—not friendly," explained Avilez. "Frankly, I will not be satisfied until Doctor Ferdanque is in jail. My reason is a good one; but it is my own. I have made it my business to be friendly with those who can give me information of what he is doing. In this case he has outwitted me, but as to the future—*quien sabe?* We have the numbers of the bills which Ferdanque says are yours, at least; and, *mas vale algo que nada*—better something than nothing."

"He says that the three witnesses who witnessed the transaction will back him up that he paid me in cash."

"Of course." Avilez's lip curled scornfully. "Liars and thieves. He could no doubt produce threescore witnesses, were he called upon to do so."

"And he says his check stubs will show no——"

"Rats!" spoke up Captain Mac. "What's the use of mulling this thing over and over without getting anywhere? Let's go to his house, drag him out o' bed, and——"

"No, no, Captain."

Avilez held up one hand, and apologized with a smile for his interruption.

"A single tap upon his door and whatever evidence there may be would be hidden beyond all hope of finding it."

"To —— with the evidence," growled Cady. "Just let me get my hands on his fat throat, that's all!"

"And you will go to jail—instead of going home," said Avilez calmly.

Avilez studied his nails for a moment, and then said:

"Your steamship reservations are made?"

"Made and paid for," said Cady sadly.

"I advise you to go to your hotel and get what sleep you can, and tomorrow, or rather, this afternoon, go aboard the steamer as though nothing had happened."

"What!"

"Yes—go home."

Avilez placed his hand upon Cady's shoulder and spoke long and earnestly. Captain Mac, seeing that the Panamanian had something in mind, joined him, and between them they talked the big man into agreeing.

"I will," he said at last, reluctantly. "I will go home to my people. If I do not receive good news from you within a week after I arrive, I'll return to Colon and do my best to make mincemeat out of Ferdanque. Then, if I get away from the police, I'll go south and begin all over again. Twelve years! ——!"

He ran his big fingers through his gray hair with a weary motion. "And whether you succeed or not—I thank you both."

He shook hands with them, and stalked off, stiff and straight, but with his feet dragging as if they had suddenly become too heavy for him, like a tired soldier.

DOCTOR FERDANQUE was well thought of by a certain class of people in Colon. He prided himself upon being more democratic than other Panamanians of his position. He always had a pocketful of good cigars and, when drinking with friends, always insisted that they were his guests and that he, Felipe Ferdanque, be allowed to pay the bill; and Doctor Ferdanque and his guests drank nothing but wine. The rank and file of cabaret patrons spoke of him as a "good sport." The only fault they could find with him was that he never gave them enough of his society. He would breeze airily into a place, order a round of drinks for the men at the bar, open a bottle of wine or two with a few friends at one of the tables, and then excuse himself and pass just as airily out.

It was his boast that he had opened at least one bottle of wine in the Ciro Café every night since that place had first opened its doors, three years before. He came in now with a fixed smile upon his face, and nodded left and right as he passed between the crowded tables; for Doctor Ferdanque thought well of himself, and particularly so this night; for the day before he had brought to a successful conclusion a business deal which promised to be highly remunerative.

Several girls of the revue skipped to his table and took seats without invitation, and the floor-man hovered near to see that the service given the doctor should be of the best. Jim Meigs, the personal bodyguard, stationed himself by the cigar-case in the lobby and, a stupid grin upon his face, posed so that all who went in or out might have the pleasure of gazing upon the heavyweight champion of Central and South America.

Now and again, depending upon whether or not he was being looked upon, he would frown darkly, thrust out his chin so that his lower lip protruded beyond the upper one, glare, knot his brows, in short, assume a ferocious expression; and then he would clench his right fist and rub his nose several times, rapidly, with the inside of his right thumb in the gesture which third-rate fighters use to denote their calling.

"Champagne—White Label," ordered Doctor Ferdanque.

"White Label," said the floor-man, passing the order along.

"White Label," repeated a white-coated waiter, and he scuttled off with his tray toward the bar.

Fifteen minutes later the doctor arose, excused himself and, declining many called invitations to sit at other tables, sauntered toward the front door. He took his hat from the attendant and passed into the lobby, where he stood for a moment lighting a cigar.

It was quite dark now, and the Colon night-life was already under way. Front Street thronged with seamen of all nationalities; American Canal Zone employes; Panamanians, Chinese, and Hindus; big, lumbering Bardaians and dwarf-like San Blas Indians. Cab bells jingled and the drivers fought with one another to reach the curb; chauffeurs blew their horns and drew upon their heads the combined sarcasm and profanity of all the drivers of horse-drawn vehicles.

Two men, one a short, squat, red-faced Englishman, the other a towering big Scandinavian, both plainly seamen, were talking together in front of the Ciro, and as Doctor Ferdanque stepped from the café to the sidewalk, a quarrel flared suddenly up between them. Another seaman, an American, a man nearly as big as the Scandinavian, came up and took the side of the small Englishman. Ferdanque paused to watch.

"You big square-headed dock-wolloper," cried the Englishman, "peddle yer fish, or I'll poke you—s' 'elp me!"

He shoved the big man roughly away from him.

The Scandinavian seemed to hesitate, then, half-grinning, he slapped the small Englishman soundly upon the cheek with his open hand. The husky American sprang for the Scandinavian and grappled with him, and the two wrestled back and forth across the sidewalk, each driving what seemed to be heavy, crushing blows to the other's body. The Englishman piled in to give his American friend a hand. From several points at once came other men, all seamen, whose sympathies seemed to be with one or the other of the combatants, for they pitched in and began to swing joyfully. In five seconds the sidewalk became a battle ground, in the middle of which Doctor Ferdanque, in spite of his struggles to escape, found himself thrust and jostled.

Men came from all directions—from Eleventh Street, from Battle Alley, from out of the saloons and cafés on Front Street and from Cristobal across the railroad tracks. They formed a delighted circle and cheered on the fighting seamen. The Ciro's bartender climbed atop his bar and looked out through the open door and over the heads of the spectators. The floor-man climbed up beside him and peered over his shoulder. Cab drivers frantically jingled their bells and whipped up their horses to get out of the jam. An automobile horn shrieked a continuous warning. A police whistle sounded and a native policeman tried vainly to break through to the center of the disturbance. But above it all could be heard the doctor's voice, crying wildly for Meigs.

Meigs suddenly awoke to the knowledge that there was work for him. He leaped to the front of the lobby in which he had been standing, bowled over a man who happened to be in his way—and then his legs, somehow, became strangely and inextricably entangled with the legs of a black-haired, black-eyed little man who stood square in the center of the doorway. Meigs went down, hard; and when he gained his feet he found that the little man was again before him, blocking his way.

"Get out o' m' way, white man," said Meigs angrily, and he reached with one gorilla-like arm to brush the other from his path.

But Captain Mac refused to be brushed out of the way. He clutched the big negro's wrist, pulled him off his balance, and calmly kicked his feet from under him. Again Meigs sprawled on his back.

The bartender and the floor-man, the only ones who were in a position to observe this minor attraction, laughed gleefully.

"This is better than th' big show," said the bartender.

"Y'betcha," said the floor-man. "Up and at 'im, Meigs!"

Captain Mac somehow, seemed bigger now. There was a deceptive depth to his chest and breadth to his shoulders. He stood now facing squarely toward Meigs, watching him, his mouth twisted into a thin, one-sided smile of derision. His feet were placed rather wide apart, his left arm was held straight down before him, with the back of his clenched fist to the front, his right arm was slightly bent at his side.

Meigs scrambled to his feet, gave a bellow of rage, and with both great arms swinging plunged at the little man who stood so quietly waiting for him. He came within striking distance—and then Captain Mac drew back the upper part of his body, and his left arm swung forward and up, like the pendulum of a clock, as stiff and straight as if it were bound in splints, and struck Meigs sharply beneath the chin, jolted his head back at an angle, held him thus, posed on his heels and off his balance, for a tiny fraction of a second. And then Captain Mac twisted his own right knee inward, stood knock-kneed, and his entire body turned on that right knee as if on a pivot. He withdrew his left fist and his right fist flashed up to the "button"—a spot a finger-breadth from the center of the chin, on either side. It was not a heavy blow, but the sharp impact of it was terrific, like that of a shot-filled blackjack; and Meigs slipped to the floor and lay as calmly sleeping as if in his bed at home. The little captain's movements had been so lightning-swift that the two men upon the bar were astounded, hardly realizing how Meigs came to be lying upon his back.

"My ——!" exclaimed the floor-man. "After twenty years of watchin' and studyin' battlers, that was the gashdarndest, most scientific knockout I ever saw!"

"Looks like somethin' happened to Meigs," remarked the bartender, scratching his head and grinning.

"Yeah," said the floor-man. "I think so. But I winked and missed about three-quarters of it."

Captain Mac turned and began to edge into the crowd about the fighting seamen. Ferdanque was still crying aloud for help. Some one had tripped up the policeman and several men were standing on him to improve their view. Other policemen were standing at a distance and blowing their whistles valiantly. The chauffeur who had been making so much noise with his horn had worked his car to the curb abreast the thickest of the battle.

Ferdanque struggled mightily to get clear of the milling men, but always some one seemed to block his way, turn him about, thrust him again to the center. Somehow he was kept in the thickest of it. They surged toward the curb, toward the automobile, a black touring-car with raised top and drawn curtains. The door of the car swung open. A heavy elbow crashed into the doctor's ribs and sent him spinning toward it. An enormous body drove against him and sent him plunging into the tonneau of the car.

"You are safe now, *amigo*," said a smooth voice, and a slender hand reached out and helped him to a seat.

The car moved away, slowly at first, but rapidly gathering speed. The gloom of the car was too thick for the doctor to recognize the man who sat opposite him, but he saw white teeth flash in a smile of welcome. He breathed a prayer of thanks and reached for his handkerchief to mop his perspiring brow—and then, as a beam of light from a street-lamp which they passed swept into the tonneau of the car, he found himself facing the business end of an extremely wicked-looking automatic pistol.

"You will be quiet, *señor*," said the same smooth, Spanish voice, and he saw the teeth flash again in a smile.

THE fight ended as suddenly as it had begun. And with as little apparent cause. The fighters merely ceased their struggling and stepped into the crowd, became lost in it. The onlookers who had expected to be on hand to count the injured, found to their disappointment that there were no injured, that they were staring at one another across an empty circle. The police, who had at last mustered in numbers sufficient to warrant their advance, came up expecting to make countless arrests, but they had to content themselves with cursing the crowd.

Captain Mac worked his way through the throng to the curb. He stepped into the cab which drew up in answer to his upraised hand.

"Washington Hotel, driver," he said in a loud voice.

The driver clucked to his horse, kicked at his bell, and they rattled off down Front Street. This street is open on one side to the sea, and the captain could see the spray flying high over the breakwater. It was in the dry season, and the northeast tradewind was fresh and strong. The harbor and the rolling Caribbean were bathed in faint moonlight; but the moon was low in the west and would soon be gone. The wind smelled of the salt sea.

They had gone but four blocks when Captain Mac reached up and touched the driver upon the back.

"Let me out here, driver," he said; "I'll walk the rest of the way."

He alighted, paid the cabman, and stood waiting while the cab went off. He stood abreast "Old Wharf," a wharf which had been built years before and was now practically abandoned. The wharf was about half a block from where he stood, on the other side of the railroad tracks. It was too dark for him to distinguish it, but he knew it was there.

Two men came along the street. They were the big Scandinavian and the small Englishman, the two who had been fighting so fiercely a few minutes before. They seemed to be looking for the captain, for when they saw him they advanced rapidly, arm in arm. They were both grinning broadly.

The small man touched the vizor of his blue-cloth cap.

"I 'opes we did a good job of it, sir," he said.

"A first-rate job," answered Captain Mac. "Here." He held out a bill. "Split this amongst the lads, bosun; and bring them back to the ship when you see fit."

"Thank you, sir," said the boatswain. "We'll drink to your 'ealth first shot, sir."

The boatswain pocketed the bill, and again touched his cap, and the two marched off arm in arm toward the center of the town.

Captain Mac went across the street, climbed a low fence, crossed the railroad tracks and made his way to the abandoned wharf. He found a small, broad-beamed power-boat, the forward half of it decked over, made fast at one side of the pier. A man arose from the string-piece at the end of the wharf and advanced to meet him.

"You have him, Avilez?" asked the captain.

"Ah, yes, my friend; I have him," Avilez nodded. "He is in the boat, under the hood. I leave him in your charge. He is very cowardly, and I have hopes that you will succeed. Anyway, even though you fail, there is a chance that I——"

"It's a two-way chance," said the captain.

"Exactly."

Avilez shook hands, smiled his characteristic smile, and strode swiftly from the wharf.

Captain Mac slipped over the side of the wharf and dropped into the motor-boat.

He lighted a lantern which he found on a thwart, and by its light he saw Doctor Ferdanque lying, bound and gagged, beneath the low deck. The fat man's eyes filled with hope as he saw the captain, but, as the little man shook his head and turned away, the hope faded and gave way to a mixture of anger and fear.

There was a small, one-cylinder gasoline-engine amidship, and Captain Mac bent over it. The heat which came from it told him that Avilez had warmed it up for him. He opened the throttle, set the spark, and rocked the fly-wheel gently; then he spun the wheel rapidly several times. The engine coughed, choked and wheezed, and then the flywheel jerked out of his hand and began to revolve. He cast off the two painters, put the clutch in reverse, and backed out from the wharf. Clear of the wharf he sent the boat ahead and steered for the two flashing lights, one red and one white, which marked the opening in the breakwater.

It was nearly eleven o'clock now and the harbor was quiet. Here and there a ship lay at anchor and there were several at the Cristobal piers. Captain Mac could see a great white ship in dock at the nearest pier. It was the *Alba,* the fruit-boat which Bill Cady was to go home in. She had been delayed. Glaring cluster-lights were hung from her masts and bridge, showing that the crew was working to prepare the ship for sea. Two tugs were puffing beneath her quarter, waiting to take her lines.

As Captain Mac's little craft neared the opening in the breakwater it began to rise and fall in the long swells which rolled into the harbor. The pounding of the great, heavy seas upon the two long, stone barriers sounded in a steady roar. The wind whipped off the tops of the broken seas and sent sheets of water driving to leeward, deluging the motor-boat and the black-haired little man who stood in the stern, at the tiller. He had taken off his coat and placed it, with his hat, in the forepeak, and his pongee shirt and trousers, dark with water, clung tightly to his spare frame. There was a thin smile on his lips and his somber eyes were hard and cold.

He sent the boat close to the eastern breakwater, rounded it, then headed toward the northeast, into the eye of the wind, tacking, however, from port to starboard as the frail craft climbed each towering sea, any one of which would have swamped it had it struck head on. He held his course until the boat was half a mile to the windward of the center of the eastern breakwater, when he took a turn about the tiller with the stern painter so that they were headed at an angle to the seas; then he slowed the engine to a speed which just enabled the boat to hold its own, caused it to lay in approximately the same position, pitching and rolling easily with a slow oscillatory motion and taking but light spray over the weather bow.

He crawled forward under the low deck and cut Doctor Ferdanque's bonds. Then he motioned the fat man to come in the after part of the boat.

The doctor came from under the deck, steadied himself and began to stretch his cramped muscles. He eyed Captain Mac curiously, and a bit fearfully.

"That's right, stretch—loosen up," said the captain; "you're liable to need all the strength and agility you've got in that fat body of yours before long."

Ferdanque gazed around him: at the long, black, gray-capped seas; at the breakwater smothered in glistening foam; and then he brought his gaze back to Captain Mac.

"What does this mean, *señor?*" he asked angrily.

"It means that you are going to pay my friend Cady the thirty thousand dollars you owe him," answered the captain calmly.

"Ah."

Ferdanque raised his hand to his small, pointed mustache and thoughtfully twirled one end and then the other.

"It means no such thing," he said at length, with a forced firmness. "Your friend has told you an untruth. I owe no man."

"I'd as soon believe this boat could take wings and fly," said Captain Mac, "as to believe Bill Cady would tell a lie, this kind of a lie. Why, he doesn't know how to lie. I've known him for twenty years. But we won't argue about that. I have decided that question myself. You will give me your note for thirty thousand American dollars; and you will also write out what might be called a confession, something which I can keep for my own protection."

"You are a fool, Captain McGuire. I tell you I will sign nothing. The moment I am ashore I will go direct to the police and have you and that scoundrel Avilez arrested."

Captain Mac did not answer; he rolled a cigaret in the lee of the weather gunwale, and lighted it; then he sat back with one arm thrown over the tiller and gazed thoughtfully at Ferdanque. Ferdanque found the calm scrutiny more threatening than a storm of angry words would have been, and he blurted out:

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you, Captain McGuire. They call you 'One-Two Mac;' you are a bully; you beat men with your hands. But I am not afraid of you. You are a fool, do you hear, a fool; and I will sign nothing, admit nothing!"

Captain Mac went forward and took a piece of paper and a fountain-pen from a pocket of his coat. He placed the paper on a thwart in the protection of the deck and weighted it with a monkey-wrench, and wedged the pen beside it.

In the very stern of the boat, fastened thwartship beneath the tiller, there was a cylindrical fuel-tank, and in the bottom of the tank there was a small valve for the purpose of draining it. The tank had a capacity of ten gallons and was now about half-full.

Captain Mac stepped to the tank and opened wide the valve beneath it. The gasoline poured in a steady stream to the bottom of the boat, and then into the bilge, where it lost its identity in six inches of oil, grease and dirty water. Then he shut off the engine, sat down and calmly resumed his cigaret. The boat's head fell off and it rolled wildly in the trough, threatening any moment to capsize and spill its contents into the sea.

Doctor Ferdanque clung with all his strength to the nearest gunwale. He saw the gasoline draining from the tank, he stared wild-eyed at the murderous line of rocks to leeward.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "It's certain death if we are thrown on the breakwater!"

"Well, yes—for you," said the captain slowly. "At least, fairly certain. Not so certain of me. I am not fat and soft like you, and I kind of think I can get over that wall to the deep water on the inside. I am a good swimmer."

Ferdanque lost control of himself and sprang for the gasoline-tank, but Captain Mac was before him.

"Stand away," said the little man, and he shoved the doctor roughly forward.

The captain put out the lantern, which he had allowed to burn so as to have it in readiness to show should they be in danger of being run down by an approaching ship. The moon had slipped below the horizon and the breakwater was now merely a line of white foam in the darkness, growing broader and more menacing as the wind and sea carried them down upon it. It seemed to leap toward them, and the deep roar of the angry combers grew louder and louder.

"You fool," cried Ferdanque. "It is murder—you'll swing for it."

"No." Captain Mac shook his head. "You and I were having a friendly motor-boat ride. Our gasoline ran out and we were blown on the rocks. That is all. And there is a good chance that we will meet the same end."

He tapped the tank with his knuckles as if to judge the amount of fuel that remained. The thin stream was still coming steadily from it, but to Ferdanque it seemed that it had less force than at first.

"Remember, doctor, when you agree to my terms, I will shut off the gasoline and start the engine. It is not yet too late."

"No," gasped Ferdanque, weakly. "No, I—I will not."

He could not take his eyes from that roaring white line of tumbling breakers toward which they were racing. The noise of the surf was now so loud that they had to shout to make themselves heard.

"It's an even chance," called Captain Mac, smiling derisively. "It's not my fault that you're fat and soft."

He tightened his belt, and then placed one foot on the lee gunwale, as if preparing to spring as far up on the breakwater as possible.

Ferdanque started up. Cold sweat joined the salt spray upon his face and hands. His knees trembled, and he felt so weak that he knew he would not be able to follow the captain to the top of the breakwater and into the deep, calm water of the other side. No; he could see his mangled body being pounded to pulp on the rocks.

But money was much to Doctor Ferdanque, and he hated to give in. For all of his fright his shrewd brain was working. His eyes filled suddenly with hope; a cunning expression came to his face. There was still time to do what occurred to him, if he hurried.

He sprang suddenly at the captain, wrapped both arms about his waist, made as if to throw him over the side. But Captain Mac was not caught unawares. He placed the palm of one hand upon the fat man's face and thrust out savagely. Ferdanque released his grip of the captain's waist, staggered back, slipped and fell. His head struck the bottom of the boat, he lay still.

Captain Mac sprang to Ferdanque and turned him over. The doctor's body was limp; his eyes were closed and his mouth hung open. He was breathing heavily.

The captain leaped to the fuel-tank and closed the valve. He went to the engine, opened the throttle and spun the fly-wheel frantically. The engine coughed weakly. The surf thundered in his ears. Each time the boat slid down the side of a wave he expected to feel the crunch of sharp rocks coming through the bottom. He twirled the fly-wheel again and again; and then, at last, when it seemed he would have to give up and prepare for the crash, an explosion came from the cylinder and the wheel began to revolve. He opened the throttle wide, kicked in the clutch, and put the tiller hard over.

The boat began to creep ahead, rounded up into the wind, fought its way very, very slowly away from the rocks.

Captain Mac did not go far to windward. He did not know how much gasoline there was left in the tank; and should the engine stop now he would be as bad off as if he had not been able to start it. He swung the boat sharply about and headed for the east breakwater gas buoy, a flashing white light in the darkness. Several times the engine missed and slowed, but each time it started up again of its own accord. The boat came abreast the gas buoy, and the wind, as Captain Mac put the tiller up, swept them into the channel.

He sent the boat so close to the end of the nearest breakwater that the wash from the top of it splashed over the gunwale and fell upon Ferdanque, lying beside the engine. The fat man started, rolled half-over, opened his eyes, then he dropped quickly back to his former position and buried his head in his arms. Captain Mac was staring ahead, toward the lights of Colon.

The boat came into smooth water, and as it did, the engine choked and died. The captain slipped row-locks in the gunwales, unshipped the rudder, cast loose the oars lashed atop the thwarts. He placed them in the row-locks, seated himself and began to pull slowly toward Old Wharf.

"Avilez will be glad to receive his boat back in good condition," he mused.

A smile came to the little man's lips, a weary smile, a smile of failure.

Doctor Ferdanque, lying face downward, his eyes wide open and staring at the dirty boards not three inches from his nose, smiled also, a cunning smile, a smile of success.

DOCTOR FERDANQUE lay in the bottom of the boat. Captain Mac climbed to the wharf with the stern painter and made it fast. He looked up. Doctor Ferdanque stood upon the wharf.

"I thank you for an enjoyable evening, my friend," the doctor said. "I think I have taught you a lesson: Physical ability can never compete successfully with mental ability."

Captain Mac stared, not yet recovered from his surprize at the fat man's quick recovery.

"I thank you again, and bid you good night."

He bowed low, but brought his bow to a sudden conclusion as the captain started toward him. He stopped running at the spot where the wharf joined the land, and called back, over his shoulder:

"I think the police will extend you an invitation to stay a while with them, Captain 'One-Two Mac.' "

The captain finished tying up the boat, then he made his way across the tracks to Front Street, where he stopped a passing cab and climbed in.

"Pier six," he said.

"Pier six, sah."

The little man settled down in the seat, his chin upon his breast. His brows were knotted and his mouth was a thin, straight line.

"Here yuh is, sah, pier six."

Captain Mac started out of his reverie. He left the cab, paid the driver, and walked out upon the long, wide concrete pier, now crowded with baggage men, customs men, and friends of those who were leaving on the *Alba*. The ship had already let go the pier and was in the channel; the tugs were turning her head toward the breakwater.

The little captain kept on down the pier, and the guard stationed there, recognizing him, smiled and let him pass on to the end.

He strode to the far corner of the pier, and stood there, alone, in the glare of a near-by arc-light. The *Alba* was now but fifty yards off the end of the pier, and was forging slowly ahead. As she came abreast, her propellers churning, heavy black smoke pouring from her funnel, a great voice boomed from somewhere amidship:

"So long, Cap'n Mac! Going ho-ome!"

The voice wavered a bit at the end.

Captain Mac swept off his hat and held it for a moment at arm's length above his head; then his voice, as clear and strong and ringing as the high note of a bugle, rose above the puffing of the tugs and the churn of the *Alba's* propellers.

"So long, Bill!"

He stood there while the big white ship slid past.

"Ah—I knew I would find you here," said a smooth voice.

Juan Avilez, his teeth flashing, his eyes sparkling, placed his slender hand upon the little man's shoulder.

"You failed, Captain Mac?" It was half-question, half-assertion.

The captain nodded grimly.

"No matter, my friend." The tall Panamanian's inward mirth bubbled into laughter. "Things have gone well. It was, as you said, a two-way chance. While *you* failed, *we* succeeded. My chauffeur and I ransacked the doctor's house from top to bottom. The money which Doctor Ferdanque himself says belongs to our friend Bill has been found; also evidence on other matters which will keep the cunning doctor a long time in seclusion —in jail. We will cable the money to Cady, and you and I, perhaps, will visit him some time, and sit on his father's porch and watch the trainman who wears the black shirt go by. Yes?"

"Yes," said the captain.

He chuckled happily.

Together they left the dock.

"Ferdanque will be surprized to see that you paid him a visit," remarked the captain as they waited for a cab.

"He won't see it—tonight," answered Avilez. "He went to the police station, for some reason—" he smiled—"and he was invited to stay."

"Hah!"

The captain chuckled again, and slapped his thigh.

"Coco Solo radio-station," said Avilez to the driver of the cab that came up.

"And hurry," added Captain Mac.

He settled back and crossed one leg over the other, shoved his hat to the back of his head.

"I think," he said, "that Bill will be glad to hear the news."

MAMU THE SOOTHSAYER

A Complete Novelette

by

GORDON MAC CREAGH

Author of "The Fish Nets of Quoipa-Moiru," "The Rope of Pedro Mendez," etc.

PART I

THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1533

A VAST mountain spur, knife-edged, towering jagged and precipitous and bare, full six thousand feet from the narrow valley—which itself was eleven thousand feet from sea level—and sloping back from there another eight or nine thousand feet to lose its stern outline under the everlasting snow masses of the Peruvian Cordillera.

Four thousand feet above the tortuous silver thread which wound along the valley bottom, and almost perpendicularly above it, a great jutting mass of dolomite, startling in its pink and pale-green marble-like discolorations against the prevailing dead gray of the limestone cliff.

Upon the very edge of the jutting rock, prone upon his belly, peering down with the unwinking keenness of the giant condors above him, a man. Brown-yellow and shrunken and old. Inconceivably old. Nobody knew how old; and he himself had forgotten.

He wore sandals of raw llama hide and baggy pants of hand-spun llama wool and a bowl-shaped hat with ear-laps of llama felt, and over all a flaming crimson poncho of the same material with a broad green border. As he sprawled motionless in the sun he must have looked to the condors like a great splotch of blood upon the painted rock.

Like a condor the ancient watcher craned his bald, withered head and looked slowly, calculatingly around. His rock was a vantage point of observation, sacred to him and his forefathers for more generations than he knew. The great spur thrust itself like a chisel blade into the landscape. Hard and unyielding, it had forced the converging stream of melting snows in ages past, to cut its path in a long detour, full five miles out of its way, to round the obstruction and then double back in a sharp angle, five miles again, till it met the softer strata of its original path.

At his back, just below the rock, was a narrow trail. Beyond it, the black jagged mouth of a great limestone cave. Opposite his face, sheer and barren, towered the other wall of the cañon, closer by half a mile than the stream far below which never saw the sun.

Away to his right and far down, perched dizzily on a subsidiary scarp, he could see the ancient Inca city of Cuzco, massive and square and clear-cut in the thin mountain air. Converging upon it he could see other silver threads winding along the mountain sides, now glittering in the sun, now tunneling underground, now expanding into clear, square-hewn pools. The conduits of the ancient capital—vast undertakings that excite the envy of modern engineers—brought water for the close-packed populace and for the terraced fields.

To his left, round on the other side of the chisel blade, and as high above him as the city was below, foamed a long white fall

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"Mamu the Soothsayer," copyright, 1924, by Gordon MacCreagh.

like a horse's tail, about which there was an ancient prophecy which was very much to the fore at the present moment. At its foot the fall formed an ice-cold lake, which the engineer of the Inca, six reigns before, had known how to tap and lead through subterranean caves and artificial tunnels to form one of the sources of one of the city conduits. The overflow splashed and leaped down, forming pools and lesser lakes as the geological structure demanded, before plunging finally round the sharp corner of the chisel blade into the sunless chasm which the old man watched so intently.

Away and up beyond the white fall wound the narrow trail, sheer against the cañon wall, cut out and buttressed and stayed with blocks of hewn granite. Up and up it went, twisting, tunneling and finally disappearing among the high passes. The well-worn, well-preserved trail to a mine. One of the gold-mines of the Inca.

Where the mine was, the old man did not know—or care. Somewhere back in the mountains; that was enough. It was none of his business to know about such little matters as mere gold.

His business, as had been the business of his fathers and grandfathers before him, was divination. The reading of omens. The unraveling of prophecies. The advising of the Inca's destinies. And just now the old man was sore beset to understand the portentous things that were happening, and to decide the best for the Inca's people.

Huayna Capac the Inca was dead. Civil war had broken out between his sons, Huascar and Atahuallpa. And in the midst of it all a strange white people had come up out of the sea and had marched into the city of Caxamarca. The prophecy had said that when a white people came riding upon fiery beasts that had flowing manes and tails like the waterfall, they would be the gods of old come to restore peace and plenty to the desolated land.

But these white people had acted not at all like gods. They had fought with Huascar, who would have received them with open arms, and had thrown him into prison. They had inveigled Atahuallpa, the last of the Incas, into Caxamarca under promise of safe-conduct, and now held his sacred person captive.

And they wanted gold. Nothing but gold. Enormous piles of gold.

Would gods so worship a mere metal that could serve no useful purpose and was good only for ornament and nothing else? Mamu the Soothsayer, hereditary priest of the sun, was sore perplexed. And a decision was urgently imminent.

To his left, high among the passes, winding down the long trail, was coming a great llama train. It brought gold from the mine. Gold of the distinctive ruddy color, in ingots, carefully sewed in little saddle-bags, thirty-five pounds to each llama. How many llamas there were he could not see. Eighty or ninety, or perhaps a hundred. Part of the ransom of the last of the Incas.

To his right, hidden from the train by the chisel-blade spur, far down in the narrow cañon, men opposed one another. One of the opposing bodies was a mere handful. Not more than fifty at most. White men dressed in bright steel breast- and back-pieces, with steel plates overlapping on their thighs, and steel helmets on their heads. Some carried keen steel blades; some steel-headed pikes; and some, the terrible thunder-tubes that spat lightning and killed from afar. Mysterious invulnerable creatures. Almost as gods.

The other party numbered about two thousand. Brown men, who wore padded, cotton quilts and carried copper swords and bows and arrows. They were massed at the lower end of the cañon where it narrowed to a bottle-neck between the cliffs. They chattered nervously to one another, uncertain, without coherence or decision. The noise of their chattering came up to the watcher high above them, softened and sublimated and confused with the murmur of the stream.

Above them, across the wider floor of the cañon, stood the white men in two ranks, silent, stern and cold.

FROM his high perch Mamu the Soothsayer could see, midway between the two bodies, a little group, foreshortened to pigmy size, conferring upon a weighty question. From that distance, of course, no word could be understood. But Mamu the Soothsayer knew very well what they were talking about.

The leader of the brown men, a *cacique* by his feather cloak, was making an eloquent speech with graceful gestures of appeal, pointing down the valley to the city of Cuzco and shaking his head, begging obviously for an extension of time.

The leader of the white men, a short man with tremendously broad shoulders and a black beard, listened impatiently to the interpreter; listened with deference to one of his own men, a tall man who wore a brown robe with a hood pulled over his head; and then shook his own head with angry vehemence. The *cacique* pleaded again with a certain stubbornness. The man in the brown robe whispered ever in the white chief's ear.

Suddenly the latter's patience exploded. He barked an order. Immediately the lieutenant by his side cut down the unarmed *cacique*. The man in the brown robe lifted high the silver emblem of his god and shouted an exhortation to the grim ranks behind. And the next instant, with incredible coolness and confidence the fifty charged down upon the two thousand.

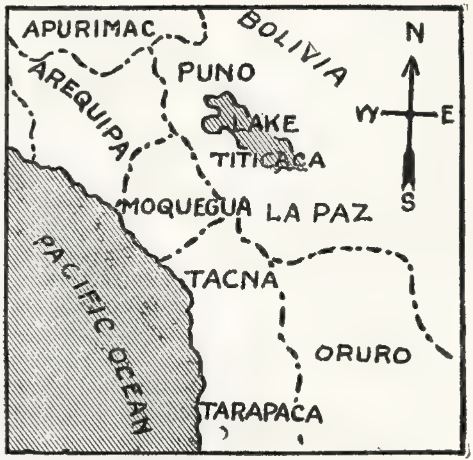
Mamu the Soothsayer groaned in body and in spirit. This same thing had happened before, and always with the same inevitable result. Always these appalling white men, a mere handful of them, with the ferocity of devils—yes, devils, not gods—had hurled themselves upon dense bodies of his own people, and always had they slaughtered them in heaps.

As had happened before, so it was repeated now. The invincible men in steel armor, close-serried, disciplined, rushed into the thick of the close-packed Indians and began to hack their way through the mass. The double ranks took the form of a wedge faced with steel, and slowly, surely, hewed their way through the heart of the mob. The bottle-neck gorge became a death-trap.

The quilted warriors of the Inca hurled themselves in masses with sublime valor upon those terrible white men. A few they dragged down by sheer weight of numbers. But only a few. It made no difference. Surely and indomitably the wedge won through to the outlet.

The ancient seer looked down on the massacre and wailed aloud for his people. To the left and up he looked and saw the llama train with its golden burden winding down that side of the spur, all unconscious of the slaughter being enacted in the dark gorge on the other side. A hundred llamas weighted with gold. And for what? For these terrible white gods—or devils, whichever they might be?

Down to the right he looked again in time to see the inevitable culmination of the conflict. The steel wedge had won clear to the neck of the gorge. The quilted warriors lay behind them. Some hundreds prone and still. Many more hundreds crawling or hobbling brokenly among the shambles. The rest huddled like sheep struck by a fearful thunder-storm. The way to Cuzco lay clear before the strangers.



But the implacable man in the brown robe held aloft his symbol and exhorted his people in the name of their god. The chief shouted an order—and the wedge turned on itself and began to hew its way through the huddled mass once again.

It was enough. The old soothsayer was convinced. There was no room for indecision any longer. This was not the peace and plenty of the prophecy that these strangers were bringing to his people. Devils they were in truth, not gods.

Gold was their god. Only gold. That feeble metal which his people used for ornament alone. Gold was the accursed cause of the coming of these white devils. As long as there was hope or prospect of squeezing gold out of the people of the Inca, so long would the devils scour the desolate land. The curse of the Supreme Lord Sun and of the lesser gods, Ilimane and Caxama and Iliammpu, upon the devils and upon their golden god! As the white devils must be destroyed, so must be destroyed forever the gold that they came to seek!

The ancient seer leaped to his feet and stretched his lean arms up to the sky in an ecstasy of denunciation. His withered body contorted itself into spasms of hate as he called down the curses of Almighty Sun upon the white devils who slew his people by the hundreds down in the sunless gorge.

The devils, for their part, knew nothing about it all; and, had they known, they would have laughed at the wild maniac who leaped like a little wizened monkey against the side of the cliff so far above them.

Yet at that very moment that feeble old man's momentous decision was making history which would affect all of that country for centuries to come.

"Accursed be the gold!" he proclaimed. "As long as gold is, so long will the devils harass the people. Never must it be given to them! Never must they find it! Never must they know the mines from which it came! *Illappa, Illappa.* It is the unchangeable law! *Illappa.* It is a prophecy!"

The llama train was rounding the last bend of the precipitous trail. In single file they came. The leaders, men with long whips, who herded the mine slaves, paused and looked with awe upon the aged priest who stood stiff now and entranced with the ecstasy of his emotion. Slowly the old man's eyes opened, as from an inward vision. He saw the long gold train waiting on the narrow path. Waiting for leave to pass behind his outpost rock round the edge of the spur and continue down the trail on the other side of Cuzco and thence to Caxamarca—in full view of the white devils below.

But Mamu the Soothsayer had decided. There was no faintest shadow of doubt in his mind now. A yellow and withered claw shot out from under his blood-red poncho and pointed at the accursed sacks of gold bound on the llamas' backs. His voice broke into a high-pitched shriek as he hurled his order:

"Destroyed must be the gold! Accursed is the gold! Accursed be he who touches it!"

The slaves looked at him, hesitating, wondering. Below them, a sheer drop of over a thousand feet, the last of the chain of lakes glittered silver in the sun before it overflowed and broke in a series of falls and plunged finally round the bend of the out-jutting spur into the dim gorge of the slaughter. The inexorable claw suddenly pointed down to it, and the priest shrieked:

"Accursed is it! Let it be lost! At once! Forever!"

The slaves hesitated still. Vast labor had gone into the gathering of the treasure; and this order was too sudden for their not overkeen wits.

But the hereditary priest of the Sun advanced upon them.

"The order of the Supreme Lord Sun!" he howled. "Let it be hidden from the white devils forever!"

Such a command from such a priest was all-powerful. A burly fellow, a slave of one of the Mansu tribes, began to understand that it meant obedience. What affair of his was it to reason why. Methodically he set his back against the cliff and slowly he planted his foot against the leading llama. Gaging his balance carefully, he gave a great shove.

The poor beast staggered, lurched and disappeared over the sheer edge. In the long silence the faint splash of it came up to them from the lake. The man stepped to the very brink and stood with toes overhanging, looking down the dizzy cliff with the coolness of the born mountaineer. Only silver ripples in three widening circles broke the surface. Nothing more. Weighted with thirty-five pounds of gold, the beast had sunk without hope, without a struggle.

As he looked, another brown wooly body hurtled down, growing appallingly smaller as it sped and seeming to poise itself for endless seconds above the surface before it struck. Then on the tense nerves broke the high fountain of spray, and presently the sound of the splash.

Another followed, and in quick, succession another. The reflection of the cloudless sun from the widening circles seemed to engulf each gold-bearer the instant that it struck the surface. The priest howled along the line, a blood-red portent on the trail, crazed with the fervor of sacrifice, wedging his frail body between cliff and beast, and pushing with all his feeble strength as he screamed the order of the Lord Sun to the slaves.

Their slow minds began to grasp the command. They saw the example and they followed it. Gold, after all, was nothing to them; while the command of the archpriest was a very imminent order. With dull uncomprehending obedience they set themselves against the rock wall and hurled one gold-bearer after another over the cliff.

Within five minutes of its inception the great sacrifice had been culminated—just five minutes before the gold-train, had it continued on its path, would have rounded the sharp bend of the trail and come into full view of the white men below.

Mamu the Soothsayer stood panting,

overcome as much by his emotions as by his exertions, glaring wild-eyed with a holy joy at his accomplishment. A faint, confused sound of wailing blended with the far murmur of the stream and filtered up round the angle of the spur from the horrid gorge below. Mamu crawled once more on to his outpost rock and looked down on the scene of the slaughter.

The terrible white men had gone, marched on down the defile. Only his own people remained. A pitiful few, who wailed over the heaps of their dead. The old man lifted his voice and wailed with them for the soul of his country about to die. He lifted his thin arms and called down his final curse for all time upon the white strangers from the sea who were devils, not gods.

Then he wrapped his blood-red poncho closely round his aged frame and slowly stepped off the painted rock, and moved across the trail and into the great cave beyond the trail. The mystic labyrinth in the mountain-side where only priests might enter and in whose vast depths other devils dwelt. Devils who shrieked and moaned in the moonless nights and whose voices could be heard by startled mine slaves on the trail.

There, in a certain chamber, Mamu the Soothsayer took from a stone coffer bundles of brightly dyed woolen strings tied in a tangle of queer knots, the *quipus* of the Inca. And he proceeded with ceremony to write in knots the history that he had made.

PART II

THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, 1924

The same jutting mass of dolomite. A little worn, a little more corroded by the fierce winds and lashing rains that had smashed and howled up and down the gorge during the long years. But still a prominent outpost, pink and pale green against the dizzy cliff.

The trail that wound to the mine was gone. A disused goat-path, a crumbling ledge, a bit of buttress and a caved-in tunnel showed where once had been a road leading nobody knew where.

The cave behind the rock remained, damp and vast and barren, an object of awe to Indians who had occasion to follow their strayed llamas that far.

The same sun slanted cold against the north face of the painted rock. The same condors—apparently—wheeled their endless circles with endless monotony high in the thin blue ether and looked with minute inspection upon apparently the same old man, prone upon his belly, who in turn looked down with the same keen caution upon white men in the valley.

The old man wore llama-hide sandals and llama-wool pants and hat and poncho. But the pants were frayed and the hat was shapelessly sodden and the poncho was a faded crimson. Almost might they have been the same. But the imported German anilins did not stand the weather as well as the vegetable dyes of the olden time, and the old man was not the all-powerful priest of an imperially established sun worship.

To Mamu the Soothsayer—enlightened people called him a witch-doctor in these days—there remained but the shadow of the ancient grandeur and the almost forgotten relics of the lore of Mamu, his great, great, to the *n*th degree removed grandfather.

But he looked with the same beady-eyed, angry suspicion down to the left of his outpost upon the white men who stalked about the borders of the silver-surfaced lake. They wore, instead of steel, Stetson hats and khaki shirts and cord breeches and high-laced boots; and they carried, instead of swords, curious shiny instruments of brass and little telescopes upon tripods through which they scrutinized the lake-level and the cliffs and the overflow; and they made notes in little books and talked calculatingly together in a little group.

There were but three of them invading the barren solitude of the valley this time, and no huddled mass of Indians opposed them. A couple of sullen and apathetic peons held the white men's mules a little lower down. That was all.

Like a condor the ancient watcher craned his bald and withered neck and looked down to his right. The gloomy gorge was empty. The valley beyond was empty. Not a hut nor a sign of habitation. Down and away at the head of the far valley of Villamcayu a new city of Cuzco raised the roofs of its blatant "palace of justice" and its cathedral and its theological seminary. Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca on the mountain-scarp called Sachsahuaman, was empty. The massive walls of it remained, roofless and overgrown, and as enduring as Stonehenge or the Wall of China—and as deserted. The people of the Inca had gone with the roofs and the roads and the conduits. The blight of the white devils who had come out of the sea seeking gold had fallen upon them and they were not. Of all that mighty race there remained but a few dull-eyed apathetic Quechua Indians, reduced to a condition of peonage, who knew nothing of language or customs or history of the greatness that had been. Not a single thing at all.

And Mamu, who knew—well, nobody knew just how much the old witch-doctor knew—if anything at all.

The eyes of Mamu glittered as coldly-yellow as a condor's as he sprawled and watched, silent and motionless upon his rock, a splotch of very old rain-washed blood.

At last words came to his lips. Muttered fragments. Forgotten memories out of the subconscious, rather than deliberate speech:

"As long as gold is, so long will the devils harass the people. Accursed is it. To be hidden from them for ever."

Muttering and mumbling, he edged himself backward off the outpost rock and scuttled across the crumbling path, a faded ragged figure of a Niblung or an old man of the hills disappearing into the dark gulf of his cave.

THE white men, for their part, knew nothing about it at all. And, had they known, they would have laughed with superior modern wisdom at the quaint old witch-doctor who grumbled forgotten omens, flattened like an ancient lizard against the cliff-side so far above them.

Yet that feeble old man had a history behind him which established his ancestor's curse as a prophecy which had held good throughout the ages. For four hundred years since the coming of those first adventurers out of the sea had others of their color scratched the bare surface of a lost history to look for hidden gold, and had scratched the barren surface of the ground to look for mines of fabulous richness. And they had found next to nothing. An occasional feeble little hoard here and a few lean mines there—and the recent haul of a clear million out of a lake that was drained in Colombia, which had reawakened the enthusiasm of search. But the fabled wealth of the Incas was as lost as was their history.

And now there came these white men with the relics of a rumor and with scientific equipment to wrest from its hiding what the last of the priests of the last of the Incas had hidden beneath the curse of the Supreme Lord Sun.

There were three of them. One, who wore a tawdry imitation of the costume of the other two, was displaying the prospect to them. He was lean and swarthy. His high, narrow eyes and heavy lips showed the unmistakable blending of Indian slave with negro slave, though his own proud claim was of an ancient Spanish ancestry. He waved his arm over the landscape with a proprietary gesture.

"This, *señores*, is the place," he said. "Yonder, high up on the cliff to the left, runs the ancient path. See, the *señores* may still see a trace of it. Below the path then, in the lake must lie the gold which the writing of my illustrious ancestor tells of. Remains only for the young *señor*—" he bowed grandly toward him—"to tell us out of his knowledge whether it may be possible to come at it."

The young *señor* was typical of thousands of his age. Athletic, clear-complexioned, with the alert eyes and slightly over-confident carriage of his kind. He had but recently earned the right to inscribe himself, James W. Temple, C.E.; and he was full of vim and enthusiasm and ignorance about everything except C. E.

He had been examining the landscape with keen interest and peering through the little telescopes, and he now made known his findings.

"This thing shouldn't be difficult at all," he announced with the confidence of youth. "The inflow from above isn't much, so we can easily side-track that, starting from that ledge there about a hundred feet up. Look! The natural formation lends itself to putting in a few sections of flume and digging a bit of channel and so bringing the whole flow out to the side here."

The third man looked wise and grunted, "Uh-huh," with dubious interest.

"Well, how about getting all this stuff out?"

The engineer was delighted to explain:

"Well, you see, there's quite a lip to this overflow here. We can blast away some eighteen or twenty feet of that and get rid of that much depth with a whoosh. After that—mm-mm——"

He ran his fingers through his mud-blond hair and cogitated with his head on one side, eying the drop of the valley as far as he could follow it before it turned the corner of the spur and plunged into the gorge.

"I had hoped," he continued, "to be able to tunnel, like those fellows did up in Colombia; but there isn't much drop, and we'd have to cut through solid rock for perhaps a couple of miles, depending upon how deep this durn lake is. No, we'll have to siphon."

The other two emitted noises indicative of the need for elucidation.

"How siphon?" The C. E. repeated their inquiry. "You know the principle of a siphon, don't you? Well, we do the same thing on a big scale. Lay a pipe line, one end in the lake, the other end as far down the valley as we have to go to get lower than the lake end. Fill 'er up with water once with a small pump, and then sit by and watch atmospheric pressure do the rest."

"Hmh, sounds easy," said the third man. "How much will that cost?"

ANTONIO LEPANTO he was, known in New York to a wide circle of friends as "Tony." Big and stoutish and prosperous looking, with the indefinable air of metropolitan bright-lights about him. Tony had amassed a small fortune in the unusually short period of two years through having perfected a system for connecting the three-mile limit with the houses of his friends. When one of the cogs in his system slipped a little he had been wise enough to take a rapid and sudden holiday abroad. In Lima his loud and lordly manner of spending money had attracted the attention of Diego Miguel de-la-Vieja y Hernando-de-Soto, who was looking for just such an American millionaire who might be persuaded to gamble on a sporting proposition.

Diego's judgment was sound. Tony, having gambled before and having won so easily by taking long chances, and being temporarily withheld from reaping his customary harvest, was easily inflamed by the fantastic allure of the story that the descendant of the de-Soto unfolded to him. He knew—everybody knew—of the stories of vast treasures hidden by the Incas. All Lima talked about that gorgeous haul in the Colombian lake.

"By golly," he reasoned, "looks like something worth taking a chance on."

Hence the engagement under frightful vows of secrecy of young Templar, who had just come out with his diploma and a confident hope of landing something in this good mining country where competition was not so fierce.

Templar ruffled his hair again over the cost problem and did marvels of mental calculation with the apparent facility of all C. E's. He screwed up his face and squinted into the distance visualizing the figures as he delivered sum, multiple and quotient.

"Of course, this is guessing a good bit before I get the canvas boat set up and go out and plumb the lake to get depth and content and all that. But s'pose we use a six-inch pipe, and s'pose I can run 'er far enough down the gorge to get a decent suction; we'd oughta get about five hundred gallons per minute. Small Knowles pump to start the suction; save gas after that; 's a big item. Timber for shoring; tools, labor, dynamite and all that. Should get 'er empty in about two months. Do the whole thing on about ten thousand dollars."

He snapped forth the last and looked at the financier for the expected outcry. But Tony Lepanto's best boast was that he was a "good sport." He smiled an easy satisfaction.

"Guess I can stand that. But now, s'pose you can get the water all out, what then?"

"Well, gee!" said the C. E. "I don't know. Depends on bottom. But in this kind of formation there shouldn't be much sludge; and I don't see any signs of a landslide or a cave-in of the cliff or anything to cover up the stuff to any extent. So, if Mr. Diego's dope is all O.K., you ought almost to be able to walk in and pick up the loot. May have to dig a little muck; but there don't seem to be anything difficult about the problem from any angle that I can see. Looks easy."

And so it was—without due consideration of the unknown factor of Mamu the Soothsayer.

"The whole thing hangs on Mr. Diego's

dope," continued Templar. "If the stuff's there, I can get it out, and that's flat."

"Well, I ain't no archæologist," said Tony. "But the dago's dope sounds like a good gamble to me."

"But assuredly, *señor,*" Diego was eager to insist, "it is as I have said. The writings of my illustrious ancestor have come down to me from my mother's side. The Hidalgo de-Soto was personally employed in the glorious battle which took place in this ravine. He was present with incredible valor at the taking of the enemy stronghold of Cuzco; and he notes, as the *señor* has seen with his own eyes, the tale—confessed by a prisoner who hoped thereby to save himself from the ministrations of his captors—about the casting away, by the orders of a priest, of the gold in order that it might not come into the hands of the conquerors."

"Aw shucks, I can't read that funny stuff," said Tony.

"But *señor!*"

The illustrious descendant of Spanish hidalgos held out two very black hands in desperate argument.

"The *señor* has had the documents verified in the Collegio Municipal. What more can be required?"

The *señor* looked at Templar for a further possible objection.

"Gee, I don't know," said the C. E., and pushed his hat back the easier to ruffle his hair. "I'm no judge of old parchments. All I can say is, if the stuff's there I can get it out on about ten thousand bucks expenditure."

"Well."

The financier lighted a long cheroot and sucked at it a while with short vigorous puffs. Then:

"Guess it looks like a good gamble to me all right. I'll shoot the works. Le's go on down to the saddle-bags and take a shot off the hip to success. I loaded in some stuff in Mollendo that's no bootleg wash. So we'll call it a day and get back to town; and tomorrow we can get right down to the matter of equipment."

But the C.E. was still young enough to be enthusiastic about his work. He guessed that he'd better stick around. There'd be measurements to be made and the canvas boat to be set up and the lake to be plumbed and various other preparations for the saving of time and consequent speeding up of the happy day when they should walk into the dry bottom and sort golden ingots out of the ooze.

"I'll be all right in the pup-tent till we can pitch regular camp. 'Tisn't the rainy season," he argued. "You can send me out some grub; and there isn't anything about the equipment that isn't mining-gear of the commonest sort. Lima ought to be full of that kind of stuff. I'll make out a list right here which you can telegraph down from Cuzco to D. C. Williams, and it'll be up on the next train—which'll be next week on this benighted line," he added with a grin.

MR. TONY LEPANTO was not averse to save time without inconvenience to himself. But he had an emendation to his engineer's plan. His voice assumed a tone of portentous wisdom.

"All right, I'll wire your list from Cuzco. But if you want quick delivery and according to your specifications, I'm going to send your order to Schneider in the Calle Commercio. There's too many of our own houses have a way of thinking 'at anything's good enough for shipment into the backwoods if you can't go an' pick it out yourself—Now don't get all wrought up, young feller. This isn't meant for a slam—An' I don't know as I altogether blame 'em. But I'm a business man, an' I've made money by keeping my eyes skinned. I've been looking around while I've been in this Lima burg an' I've learnt that there's a heap of American firms seem to think anything's good enough for the South American trade. But these Heinies are out to build up business. Ask any importer in Lima."

Templar breathed heavily as if he had been personally insulted and did not know what to do about it. Finally he stated his creed—

"I don't believe an American firm would do that sort of thing."

Mr. Tony Lepanto had long ago lost the faculty of recognizing that obscure ideal known as business integrity. He laughed in huge delight at the youngster's wide-eyed disillusionment, and slapped him on the back with boisterous cheer.

"Ha, ha, cheer up, young feller," he told him out of the wisdom of his experience. "You'll learn soon enough that you've got to watch out for your own end every time 'cause nobody else is going to do it for you. What I'm telling you is the right dope. Only hope the dago's dope about the boodle is as good. You stick out here if you like and get busy on the job, and I'll make it right with you. I'll give you a cut-in on the jack when we get it.

"But there's no use in me sticking around in this —— forsaken hole in the ground waiting for machinery to arrive, and freezing solid in the mean while. So I'll go on in with your list and shoot it through; and I'll put up in the bug-roost they call a hotel. They got some honest hooch there anyway, an' I can maybe jazz some of these gloomy spicks up to a little gaiety. You come on in as soon as you get a bellyfull here."

SO THE two rode into the city of New Cuzco, and the white man proceeded to while away the week by educating the native mind with his delineation of right-up-to-the-minute modern American gaiety—which somehow did not recommend itself as very dignified to the Latin-American idea.

However, even the railway which runs from Lima to Cuzco; and thence to Puno on Lake Titicaca, to connect by boat with Bolivia, does finally arrive. Templar rode in from camp with an inexorable note-book in which to write down on the spot a list of misfit parts and shoddy goods. He was surprized to find everything exactly according to invoice. Mr. Tony Lepanto grinned at him with moist-eyed amiability, settled himself with extreme deliberation on a crate and said—

"I told you so."

Then he proceeded to give an aimlessly rambling lecture on the benefits of keeping one's eyes skinned in business. It was evident that the effect of jazzful gaiety was difficult to shake off.

And then came along an incident which shook it from him with a sudden jar. He saw the freight-bill. For a full minute he studied it, and added and re-added the column while his face changed from a pale-olive tint to a dull-red, and the pale watery eyes rolled with a growing indignation. Then he exploded. His bull-neck swelled and his voice bellowed so that the world might hear.

He was an American citizen, he proclaimed to all and sundry, and he refused to be swindled by any one-horse, jim-crow, two-foot-gage railroad in any yellow-belly country on earth.

He wasn't the kind of person that anybody could put it across on, and it would take white men anyway and not a set of monkeys—and much more to the same effect.

The railroad officials heard him with bored tolerance. They had met that kind of gringo before, many of them, and they knew that their customs were different from South American customs. They explained patiently that the coal which had hauled this freight some four hundred miles and some eleven thousand feet up into the mountains had come from the *señor's* own country of Pennsylvania. But the gringo insisted in loud English that he didn't give a hoot where it came from; he refused to be robbed by a gang of gosh-blanked spiggoties; and he would go and see his consul about it, he would.

Templar felt sick for his country and hoped desperately that the officials might not understand that brand of English. The illustrious descendant of the *conquistadores* grinned at him with a maddening familiarity. He saw no reason why he, *mestizo* though he was, was not quite as good as the *Americano.*

"*Amigo,*" he said with intimate confidence. "Better get your *compadre* away before he gives offence. I will follow with the goods. I have arranged with a *fletero* who contracts to carry the things out by mule-pack; and I will bring peons for labor."

It took Templar half an hour of anguished argument. But he succeeded eventually in persuading his compatriot to leave the matter in the hands of a very much harassed consular agent and to ride out with him to the scene of operations. As he rode he made shift to restore good humor by telling of the gratifying physical conditions which his investigation had revealed.

He had paddled all over the lake, he said, and had found an average depth of about seventy feet. There were apparently some deep pockets towards the center; but that would not interfere with them in any way; for the depth at the base of the cliff where the treasure was was only sixty feet. Bottom seemed to be a bit softer than he had hoped, which, coupled with the extreme chill of it, precluded any hope of diving. So they would just go ahead with the original plan of siphoning; and his estimate of the cubic content of the lake was just about what he had guessed. So there was going to be no difficulty at all about anything; and within two months they would surely be collecting their ingots.

All this was eminently satisfactory. Yet the employer, in his existing mood, found room to grumble at the monotonous prospect of spending two months in such an isolated frozen camp. However, he had ordered a few cases of the real stuff to be sent in with the other equipment and he guessed they would be able to stick it out somehow. His temper was not improved by finding that the camp gear did not arrive that night, and he was forced to sleep in a pup-tent with insufficient covering for that frozen altitude.

It was not till the next morning that the cavalcade straggled in. Up the gorge it came with the exasperating dilatoriness of mules, left very much to their own devices, in whom persists the unquenchable hope that they may be able to find something eatable by nozing under the sunny side of boulders three thousand feet above vegetation level. But it all arrived at last; the pipe, slung tandem between a mule at each end, and the rest miraculously balanced with the awful muddle of raw-hide rope that only an Andean mule-packer can contrive.

With the mules plodded in a dozen peons under the illustrious Diego. They were Aymaras, as dull and drooping and depressed as the mules; beasts of burden, with very little more to live for than their four-footed companions; creatures born to labor that they might get something to fill their bellies and the minimum of something to cover their bodies from the biting cold.

Diego had hired them as their *padron*, by which arrangement he made a commission as a side-line to treasure-hunting, of ten per cent. on their wages. He was, in fact, a labor contractor, and he treated his labor with quite as much consideration as the *fletero* did his mules.

Only, the far-away drop of the blood of the *conquistadores* rendered him much more efficient than the latter. Without waste of time, now that he was on the spot at last, he cuffed two of the men into understanding that their job was to scout roots and sparse twigs twenty miles down the valley where things began to grow and to keep the camp supplied with firewood for the cook who would be along presently. He kicked others as indiscriminately as he did the mules and showed them how to set up tents. He swore much better than the *fletero* and got a lot more accomplished. He was a good man, was Diego of the illustrious descent.

Templar contrived to add to the confusion by long arguments with Diego to the effect that that was not the way to get the best results out of labor. In America, he explained, workmen were not kicked—much. Diego smiled and shrugged and waved his hands with deprecatory insistence. Would a mule go, he demanded, if it were not beaten? Would a peon work? And in the meanwhile both mules and peons stood about with drooping heads and enjoyed the respite. Yet at the end of a full day the gear was all finally unloaded and disposed of and the mules disentangled from the mess and sent home. A strenuous day.

TEMPLAR rose early the next morning, all eager to get to work. He enjoyed the idea of a dramatic flourish for an opening. So he decided to blast away the lip of the lake-shore as a beginning and encourage everybody by the satisfactory diminution of the water by some eighteen feet at one fell swoop. He set his force to drilling, at the points he marked out for them, to plant his charges.

And high above, Mamu the Soothsayer lay flat on his rock and watched with uneasy suspicion. He did not know just what the white men were proposing to do. Something that must be circumvented, he knew. That was all. But how? He was a lone, feeble old man with only a half-forgotten legend of a sacred trust behind him. How was he to encounter these all-powerful, all-wise white men who came up out of the sea? He did not know. He could only watch and wait.

All day he watched men drill holes in the rock. He did not understand what was the purpose of the maneuver. He tried to size up those who were obviously the leaders. The *padron*, he understood. Him he hated as a renegade; half-Indian, but a traitor to that half. But there was something more. Old Mamu the witch-doctor, with his lore of the forgotten centuries, was very close to vague impressions that came to him out of nowhere. He felt instinctively that this was his arch-enemy.

The lusty young man with the tousled hair and the open face, he felt afraid of. This was the one with whom he would have to match his wits. The other, the big man who sat moodily upon a rock and smoked cigars incessantly, he knew to be the moving force, the boss. Obviously, since he did not work.

Late in the day the holes appeared to be completed to the young man's satisfaction. The old man saw him place little packages into each with personal care and then fill the holes up with earth and tamp it in. He knew many spells which entailed the burying of charms in secret by night. But what wizardry was this that could be done in the full view of broad daylight?

The workmen were suddenly hustled off to safety down the valley, and all stood motionless in a group by the tents while the witchcraft worked. Little wisps of smoke, just discernible from that height, ran along the ground and disappeared into the holes.

Then with awful suddenness the earth rent itself asunder and all hell spouted up out of the gash. Mamu felt a hot blast of air hurtle past his face and suck at his breath. Like an aged turtle he shrunk his head within his poncho and clutched with instinctive fingers and toes at the smooth surface of his perch. Through his dizziness he heard the falling of great rocks and the roar of waters.

When he was able to look again he saw a turgid stream filling half the ravine, almost up to the level of the tents, and his sacred lake dwindling before his eyes.

For fifteen awful minutes he watched, feeling his own blood ebb with the lake, having no knowledge of how long this devastating phenomenon might continue. He could picture the secret bottoms, which must never be seen by white men, being laid bare, and he called with desperation on the setting sun which looked coldly aslant on the scene to protect its ancient secret.

And the sun heard him; for presently the rush of waters began to slow down and presently it stopped. But twenty feet of the sheer cliff glistened slimy and wet below the encrusted ring that marked the level that used to be.

Mamu the Soothsayer leaped to his feet and stood on the very edge of his rock and lifted his withered arms to the sun in supplication.

"*Illappa!*" he wailed. "*Illappa, Illappa!*"

His thin voice echoed up the sides of the ravine.

From far below the white men looked up and saw the fantastic figure poised against the cliff, his faded-crimson poncho fluttering like a danger flag in the chill wind that whistled straight down the gorge from the snow peaks.

"Say there," Tony wanted to know, "what's the queer old duck doing up there?"

"That, *señor*," said Diego, shrugging and spreading his hands with a sour look, "that is without doubt one of the old witch-doctors of the Indians. The ignorant peons go to them for charms and magic and medicine and things. We of course, *señor*, know that they are silly fools. But if one does not give them money they cause trouble among the peons. *Carramba*, better that we shoot him now. A cartridge of Weenchester is cheaper than a bribe."

Templar and Tony looked at one another, wondering whether the illustrious one was in earnest. But Mamu solved the question by disappearing from his aerie. At that height and angle the cliff face looked perfectly flat, and it seemed that he had stepped like a goblin right into it.

A very successful day! With such an auspicious opening the morrow was to inaugurate the beginning of the flume which was to side-track the in-flow. Maybe a week's work; maybe a little more; and then the pipe could be laid for the siphon.

TEMPLAR awoke, therefore, very early, full of enthusiasm and energy, and shouted from within his tent for the cook to hurry up with the coffee.

"*Sí, señor,*" came a sulky voice from the cook. "*Immediatamente, señor. Pero se han ido los muchachos excomulgados. No tengo lena mas.*"

Which meant that the two unnameable cook's-helpers had beat it and he had no firewood.

Templar grumbled to himself that he could wait for coffee if it came to a pinch; and he whistled not very harmoniously the refrain of a popular song as he dressed, visualizing the while just how he was going to proceed with the work, the coffee already forgotten.

He stepped out into the freezing morning and bawled for Diego to muster the crew. My gosh, time was flying; the treasure was waiting, and nothing was being done.

The tarpaulin stretched against the cliff-face, which was all the shelter accorded to peons, remained inert. No crew emerged. No Diego.

Tony Lepanto struck a night-capped head out of his tent-flap and cursed the cold and inquired what the bawling was about. Templar told him, and he dressed with marvelous suddenness—it was clear that he had not washed—and came out to help him bawl.

He was very suspicious about everything and very much annoyed.

"'T's the worst of these spics," he growled. "Y' can't rely on 'em. Condemn that dago; it's his job to get the men out. I'll have to fire him if he can't pep 'em up some."

"Yeah, I don't cotton much to him myself," Templar agreed. "And gee whiz, I don't like his methods. One of the courses at the col. was on the handling of labor; and goshalmighty, I'm not surprized that these poor —— don't show any interest in their job. We ought to be able to get another foreman. But since the documents are his, I suppose he's got to stick."

Tony Lepanto looked out of the corners of his eyes to try to understand whether so much innocence could be genuine. To his way of thinking, the documents had ceased to have any value as soon as the lake had been identified. But Templar with corrugated brow was inspecting the scene of yesterday's blast and kicking moodily at the loose stones. There was no guile in that face. Just plain American—of a type that Mr. Tony Lepanto had not mixed with very much. He said nothing, and lighted a cigar.

Just then Diego himself came round the corner of the spur out of the ravine and stamped up to where they stood.

"*Señores*," he reported, "the peons have all escaped during the night. Not a one has stayed. Not a sign is left. That the Guadeloupe may curse their pig ancestors!"

"Escaped? But, good gosh, why? What was wrong?"

Diego threw out his hands.

"How should I know, *señor?* This is the way with peons. Lazy they are from the day of their misbegetting. To make them work one must beat them."

He sat familiarly on the rock by the side of the gringo, his partner, and cursed for a full minute in picturesque Spanish. The gringo kept pace in crude English.

"——" the illustrious one swore, and sprang to his feet. "I ride to Cuzco to bring other peons—and a whip of bull-hide. This lost day shall be made up; and, rely on me, *señores*, these ones shall not escape. I pitch tent below them in the narrow; and upwards they cannot go. *Carramba!* The *señor* has perhaps a *cigarro?*"

So the day was spent in aimless and fretful waiting. It was not so bad for Templar; for he could find employment in planning the simple details of his flume. But the financier of the project chafed. He was peevish at the cold and inaction. He walked aimlessly, huddled in his plutocratic fur coat, and swore. He smoked incessant cigars, and swore. He humped himself down upon convenient boulders and chewed upon his cigar-ends the while his eyes roved restlessly, frowning from under bushy brows, and swore. And with each change of action he took a nip from a heavy silver flask "to keep out the cold."

THIS roving eye caught sight of the waterfall far up the valley, and he regarded it with scowling disfavor for a while. Then he called Templar:

"Say, young feller. I dunno whether you've noticed it; but I like to keep my eyes skinned when I'm in on any business deal; so I'm asking you. Where's all that water go? There's a heap more coming down up there than flows in here?"

Templar had not given him credit for so much observation. He had been wondering about that himself; and he hazarded his theory:

"Just where it goes, I can't say, Mr. Lepanto. Probably into some fissure."

"A fissure? What all's a fissure?"

"Oh, well." The C. E. thought a while how to serve his knowledge for popular consumption. "All this is a limestone formation, you see; and in limestones there are always patches and veins and streaks of sodium salts and magnesium salts and sulphates and such stuff that is soluble in water. In the course of ages seepages through the surface have gradually melted these away and left underground channels, fissures, running sometimes for miles. There's a well-known instance back in Nevada of a regular underground river, the Armagoso. Limestone caves are formed that way mostly. Well, somewhere up there the flow from that fall has met a fissure and has gone careering into the bowels of the earth to break out somewhere or other. But it don't come over the edge to us, so we should worry."

"Hm. 'S it safe?" grunted the popular consumer.

"Oh, sure. You see, there's no sign of the overflow from this lake ever having been any more than it is now. At least, not for a very long time. No, I take that first statement back. The overflow used to be considerable. You see, these stones way out here are water worn. I imagine that the water from the fall used to come over here; and then it found its fissure and got side-tracked."

"Hm!"

The financer grunted again, took another drink, and retired under his fur collar.

With evening came the new peons and a raging Diego. He could hardly contain himself. He threw himself off his mule and stormed up to the white men.

"*Carramba, señores*, what think you?" he fumed. "That accursed witch-doctor! I kill him, *amigos*, with this hand! *Canastos!* Look you now. I found one of those who had run away. Him I beat till he confessed. And why? Guess, *señores!* Evil spirits lived here, he said. Devils howled at them in the night. It was a warning of death; so they fled. Do me evil, if it was not that wizard with his tricks. Always is it so. Blame me that I did not shoot him the same moment that I saw."

There was a silence, broken only by the guttural grumblings of Diego, till Tony Lepanto expelled a cloud from his lips.

"Well, if that ain't a hot one! What d'yuh know about that?"

"You know, I thought I heard noises during the night," said Templar. "High up they sounded. I figured they were birds; night-jars or something. I was going to ask about it—I'll be durned. I suppose the old coot toots a horn or something and scares these Indians stiff."

"——" Diego swore. "Horns or birds or devils, these ones shall not so easily escape me. Nor that witch-doctor! *Carramba*, but it was my illustrious ancestor who knew how to deal with these people. As I, Diego de-la-Soto, know too. *Señores*, the men are here. The treasure awaits. To work!"

So Templar directed the building of his flume while Diego made provisions for pitching his tent at the head of the ravine where it narrowed down to a few yards. The peons' tarp shelter would thus be guarded by the white men's camp above, in which direction escape would have been arduous anyhow; and by his own tent below, in which direction he felt viciously sure that escape would be not at all. To all intents and purposes it might have been convict labor.

"Gee whiz!" Templar grinned dubiously. "Looks kinda like slave-driving, don't it?"

"*Como señor?*" Diego expostulated with his ready spread hands. "Slaves? But by no means. Are they not paid? *Carramba*, I had to promise them twice the usual before I could get them out here. Though—" he shrugged—"that was only a trick to pay for the trick of the witch-doctor. But—" he raised his voice to drown out Templar, who looked as if he were about to say something—"we are honest men, the *señores Americanos* and I of the blood of de-Soto. We pay them an honest wage. Believe me, *señores*, there are others, people of no family, who make promise and pay not at all. *Verdad;* it is true."

Templar shrugged in turn and let the still small voice remain still. He was no evangelist. Just an ordinary young American from an engineering college. He couldn't hope to alter the system of a country. He was there to do a job of engineering.

So he focussed his attention on the job in hand with all the strenuous energy that belonged to his youth. The flume grew; not so fast as he thought he could have done it with willing labor. But it progressed. A bit of channel, a little shoring up, a stretch of board aqueduct. Taking advantage of the natural formation wherever it could, it crept along from day to day.

AND from day to day the old soothsayer watched from his high aerie, flattened out like a lizard in the sun. This new move was something that he could understand well enough. His people from olden time had known all about the making of conduits for water. The only thing that mystified him was why the thing did not connect with the stream. There was a wall of rock at the channel head.

He puzzled over it, a growing fear gnawing at his heart as the work progressed; and he racked his brain for a plan to hamper or stop the sacrilege. It was a desperate problem for a lone and feeble old man. He was a very shrewd old wizard. He knew his Indians from every angle and understood how to bend them to unquestioning obedience. But here he was pitted against a stranger folk who did not respond to his wizardries and who had terrible magics of their own. Enough to frighten away any ordinary *ipage* or medicine-man. But he was Mamu, hereditary descendant of Mamu who had made the golden sacrifice. This was an old standing feud to the death.

By day he watched and racked his brains. By night his devils howled high in the mountain crags and their eldritch shrieks echoed up and down the ravine. The peons rose in a body on the first night and crept with the silence of ghosts past their overseer's tent, making for the open valley. Not a sound came from their taskmaster. His tent remained silent and dimly outlined against the rock. Once round the bend of the ravine, they would be free to run like frightened goblins down the gorge and out to freedom. In a body they reached the corner. There was a little scuffing as they slipped round the sharp angle of the spur. Nobody wanted to be the last.

And then, as they turned the corner, they were met by a demoniac figure who waited for them in the dark and lashed at them with savage joy with a long whip of bullhide.

"——!" the figure raged at them. "Try to run away, would you? Afraid of devils, yes? Well, here is a devil who is much worse than your screeching spooks. Back to your pen, dogs; or I tie the first one I catch and cut him in two."

And the peons bellowed dumb-animal cries and huddled like sheep back to their shelter. They tried no more to escape by that road. They worked better, too. Sullenly, as always; but Diego carried the terrible whip hanging from his wrist by a loop of leather, and threatened to use it on any excuse. He would have done so, too, had Templar not strode up to him on the first occasion and talked to him with a very set face, and cold.

"Mr. Diego, when those men are on the job they're *my* labor," he said very distinctly. "You pass my orders on to them, when they're off the job; well, I suppose since you're partners with Mr. Lepanto and their contractor, you've a right to look after them your own way. But no strong-arm stuff during hours."

The partner immediately appealed to his partner. But Mr. Tony Lepanto had taken occasion to brace himself against inaction and cold a little more often than even his practised head could stand. He looked dully from one to the other with moist eyes and settled the dispute with magniloquent obscurity.

"All right," he said.

Diego stood scowling, and Templar tense. But there was nothing more to be got out of that fuddled condition. So the half-breed gave way before the white man, and the work progressed once more. It progressed quite well. After a few days Templar found he could relieve some of his trench diggers and utilize the time in joining up pipe.

"You see," he explained to Diego, whom he had forgiven, within half an hour of establishing his point. "We can join up some four lengths, which is about all we can handle with our full crew; and then we'll rig a shear-legs and lower the whole section into the water here where it's deep. Then we'll join an elbow at this end and carry over the bank. After that it's a two-man job and the rest can get ahead with the flume."

Diego had to admit the sense of it; and, though he still scowled, he explained the maneuver to the peons and helped to carry it out. The work progressed apace. The flume was nearly completed. Just some thirty more feet, and then there remained the comparatively easy job of joining pipe and carrying the line on down the valley.

And then, in broad daylight, five of the eleven peons disappeared. Just vanished into thin air. They had been working, all five of them, on the flume when it was decided to knock off for lunch. Diego, of course, kept incessant watch on the lower gorge. Above was bare ravine, steep, broken by little falls and sloping terraces, scalable of course; but no place where a man could hide without a full half-hour of strenuous climbing. Yet they were gone. It might have been witchcraft.

Diego rushed at the remaining six who sat dully apathetic by the pump which they had been installing at the edge of the lake. He lashed out at them indiscriminately with his whip, the while he shrieked in frenzy:

"Where did they go? —— Tell me, dogs, or I rip you in two! Tell!— You won't?"

Swish!

"Tell!"

Templar reached him and caught his arm.

"Cut that out, Diego. You're crazy!" he snapped.

Diego was, for the time being. The negro in him had reverted to pure jungle man, and the faint trace of Latin was in the grip of uncontrollable rage. He struggled fiercely with Templar to get his whip-arm free. The Indians crouched sullen and inert. It had been beaten into many generations of Indian peons not to run away when they were beaten. They winced as the lash curled round their bodies, but remained as dumb as cowed dogs.

Mr. Tony Lepanto staggered up the slope. His lunch had come wholly out of a bottle. He was very much annoyed about this fresh delay to his treasure hunt. He was in no condition to reason. But in a fuddled way he felt that his fortune was being dissipated upon recalcitrant working men. When things were not going his own way he was not such a very good sport apparently.

He lurched up to the group, stared owlishly at them for a moment, then he drew back a heavy foot and kicked the nearest Indian clear off the bank into the icy lake. With drunken singleness of purpose he kicked another to follow the first.

Templar let go of Diego's arm to turn his attention to this new maniac. Tony, fortunately, was not difficult. He struggled with drunken insistence to accomplish his object; but as a drunken man will, stupidly with thick mutterings of:

"Leggo me. Lemme get at the mutts."

Restraint in his case was more a matter of persuasion than of force. Presently he was induced to relinquish his idea and sit down upon a convenient boulder, where he swayed grumbling, and resorted to some more stimulant after his exertion, more than was really needful.

* * *

THE diversion on the whole was fortunate. The Indians were aroused from their apathy to help their fellows out of the lake. They knew what immersion in that chill water meant. Diego, too, was startled by the near tragedy out of his fury. Considerably sobered, he ordered the shivering wretches to go and dry off at the cook's fire. Templar was left alone between his two employers. He was very pale, and breathing hard. Just what to do he did not know. Decision comes with age; and he was younger by half than either of them. Still, this kind of thing could not go on. He struggled for speech and stammered and finally delivered himself:

"Mr. Lepanto, I—both of you, I mean! This sort of stuff's got to stop; or I quit right here. This is no way to run a job."

Mr. Lepanto nodded with the portentous solemnity of an owl.

"I agree with you," he muttered. "Dago shou'n't beat 'em up. Le's take a drink on it."

Templar turned from him. He was hopeless. Diego spread his hands. His rage had passed as quickly as it had come.

"But, *señor*, they are peons, no? One cannot permit peons to escape without remonstrance, or we have soon no labor."

"My goshalmighty!" Templar was splendidly indignant. "They'll surely run away if they get treated that way. Who wouldn't? 'Sides, these ones didn't run away. You're plain crazy."

"But, *señor*, it is necessary——"

"Well, this rough stuff must be cut right out." There was a snap to Templar's voice as he interrupted him. "We can't keep the job going like this. Those men have gone. Somehow, somewhere. Maybe we can find out. In the mean while we've got to keep going. I'm here to get this job done, and it's going to get done. Gosh man, can't you see it's plain horse-sense?"

Diego shrugged an acceptance of what he couldn't avoid, and moved away to seek comfort in the enlargement of his wrongs to his partner. But Mr. Tony Lepanto had retired into the obscurity of a permanent wooziness. The everlasting cold, he grumbled, got into his bones. Nor was he able to adapt himself to living in a tent far from the flesh-pots and the bright lights. So Diego helped himself unobtrusively to his partner's store of liquor and sulked by himself.

Once more the work went on. Slowly, for Templar had to concentrate all his remaining six on the completion of the flume; and Diego was not of much assistance in translating orders. When he was not sulking, he prowled about the steep walled prison of the ravine as if looking for some hole in the ground where his deserters might have crawled.

Still, progress continued. Templar threw off his coat and lost his hat and buckled right in with his crew. He found that it was quicker and faster to show them how a thing was to be done and to call on them for mere brute power than to attempt to explain.

A few more evenings saw the flume completed. It was dry of course, and awaited only the small charge that was to blast out the remaining rock wall of the pool from which it led, which would then drain via the channel and out past the lake.

This was a simple matter of a couple of sticks. Templar planted the charge, touched off the fuse and raced back along the empty flume to safety. In a few seconds came the sharp concussion of dynamite in hard rock, and the retaining wall fell away just as the engineer had intended. It was followed by a rush of water rolling stones and débris before it. A very satisfactory little shot.

The echoes crackled back and forth as they leaped up the ravine walls. Templar shouted an enthusiastic—

“ ’Ray.”

And at the same time there came down to them a thin wail, tremulous and high-pitched:

“Illappa, Illappa! Inti ccama arajpacha! Illappa!”

MAMU stood once again on the brink of his rock with his withered arms stretched out to the Supreme Lord, Light of the Heavens, in agonized appeal. A blood-red target clear against the cliff-face.

“——! This time I get him surely.”

Diego hissed his murderous purpose in bastard Spanish, and ran down to his tent. Templar had no inkling of what he intended to do till he saw him come out with a short Winchester .44, cursing at the magazine, which had jammed in his haste.

Unlike most tenderfoot engineers, Templar carried no gun. The distance that separated him from Diego was some fifty yards. There was nothing for it but speed. He was young and active and had played football, which explains perhaps how he contrived to traverse that rubble-strewn slope in so short a time and remain intact. But Diego had managed to fire one hurried shot before the low tackle rolled him, with Templar, rifle and all, into the muddy torrent that was now making its new channel from the overflow of the flume.

He was on his feet in a second, spitting grit and rage; and his first instinct was for his rifle, the original impulse still dominant. Templar found himself marveling, with the queer lucidity of tense moments, how the man's whole reaction was that of a hunter anxious to get in another shot before his game could escape, rather than that of a man trying to kill another human.

But Mamu, of course, had gone. Disappeared into the cliff-face as before. Diego stood glaring eagerly aloft, as one hoping to catch another glimpse of a mountain-goat or an ape leaping from crag to crag. When he turned in final disgust, Templar's hands were already on his rifle-barrel.

Curiously enough, Diego's impression persisted. He was incensed at Templar, not murderously, as the latter had expected, but with aggrievment for having spoiled his aim.

“*Tcha-tcha, señor*. That was beyond excuse. But one second more, and I would have toppled it clear into our very lake. Now I am without knowledge even whether I wounded it. *Carramba*, how without sense! Now we have endless trouble again.”

The coolness of his disgust was extraordinary. Templar stood taken aback, groping vaguely for understanding of this man's point of view with respect to the dividing line between human life and Indian life. Without conscious volition words came to the surface.

“Cut that stuff out,” he said lamely.

Diego threw out his hands, as always. What use was there in trying to reason with this domineering *Americano* who was swayed by sentiments unbalanced by reason?

“As the *señor* wills,” he shrugged. “But tomorrow, believe me, we find more trouble.”

He gave in gracefully enough. But he solaced his disappointment and soothed the wound to his pride by stealing another bottle of his partner's whisky.

TOMORROW came. And the trouble was there.

Templar awoke with a vague something not right impinging upon his subconscious. His first thought was for his labor. He stuck his head out of his tent and looked down to the tarp shelter. No, there they were, all six of them, huddled over a wisp of fire cooking their allowance of beans and fish. He dressed quickly and came out, still uneasy. And then suddenly he realized. The water!

He had gone to sleep with the harsher sound of the overflow from his flume splashing down its new channel. But now the new channel was dry, and the overflow from the lake glided smoothly along its old course. For some reason the flume was not working.

Diego was up and out as soon as he heard Templar stirring, and together they walked up inside the cut to look for the trouble, Diego cursing softly and muttering—

"It is I who told you."

Arrived at the very end, the cause of the stoppage was simple. The channel was choked with stones and rubble. Clearly no accident, but the work of human hands. Diego's hysterical whine was that of a hound upon a scent:

"Blood of a thousand saints! *Mira, señor*. This is the completed insult. This is indignity heaped up. Thus he jeers upon the failure which the *señor* caused last night. Not even did I wound him."

Templar was silent. What reply more difficult than one to the charge of, I told you so?

Diego hissed, whistling exhalations through his teeth, as he scouted round, full ninety-nine per cent. trail-hunting Indian plus negro; only his dress and his speech proclaiming a very faint one hundredth of illustrious distant white.

"*S-s-sacramento!* If he has left but some trace; some footprint maybe!"

He scrambled up the shelf over the pool and nosed around. Templar followed, almost as eager.

"*Mira señor!*" Diego's sudden shout was triumphant. "An overturned stone! Observe, the bottom is moist."

The shelving hillside was traversable: He scrambled along, careless of the stones he dislodged to roll down on Templar below. Another high yell heralded a find:

"*He lo aqui una alpagarta!* A grass sandal! By here assuredly he came. And look! There above; the holes of feet in the gravel!"

He scrambled on, possessed with impatience. Up over another shelf. Round a jutting rock. And then he yelled his triumph aloud.

Templar panted up beside him and found himself looking into a thin cleft in the face of the cliff, a regular chimney. Natural ledges and jutting points formed a foothold which a man, bracing his back against the opposing wall, might well climb. At just about face height was a depression obviously chipped out to help the natural formation. And highter up a scrap of rag fluttered in the strong up-draft.

Diego's face, as he looked, was slowly undergoing a transformation. The ninety-nine per cent. of questing savage on the blood trail was being overlaid by hot-blooded vindictive white. The illustrious scion of the *conquistador* was darkly revengeful, almost grim.

"*S-s-so?* By this way he came? And somewhere up there he lives. *Bueno*—" he began to tighten his belt as he gaged the climb— "The witch-doctor who would despoil me of my inheritance. The bane of my family since the beginning. *Sanctissima Trinidad!* Hear me now. I make oath. The holy work that my illustrious ancestors started, I go to finish now. As long as this witch-doctor is loose, so long will the treasure be withheld. That is sure. *Pues*, I remove the obstacle."

With an incongruous reverence that was amazing he performed the sign of the cross, and added climax by pulling a cheap revolver from his pocket and inspecting the load.

Templar seemed always to be having to hold this man's arms in restraint. Yet it was his unconscious and dominating impulse. His jaw began to thrust itself out in obstinate opposition—

"None o' that stuff, Diego."

THE illustrious scion was plainly at a loss to understand the many inhibitions of this so meddlesome American.

"*Pero señor, porque?* This man, is he not your enemy as well as mine? Is he not over and above an Indian? Thereby adding to his interference, insult in addition. *Por Dios*, why does the *señor* so infernally protect his life?"

Templar, faced with the question, was

flatly unable to say. How was he to explain the reasons for the indefensible conventions about human life which held in his country to a man whose code about nearly everything differed so radically from his own? He could not tell himself just why he had to interfere. It was just because—well er—hanged if he knew. But— He ran his fingers through his hair and dodged the issue.

"Anyway, I was thinking about those tracks. Now I don't know a hoot about trails and all that. But wasn't that lead too plain? Why, durn it, *I* could have followed it. And I don't take that old witch-doctor for anybody's fool. What does he want to lay a scent like that for? Why does he want us to follow?"

The scion of the de-Soto was as scornful in his underestimation of the old wizard's cunning as the hidalgo, his ancestor, might have been.

"That savage? Hah, but the *señor* does not know these animals of the mountain-tops."

Templar was in no position to argue. Yet he had a thought.

"Those Indians. The five peons. They must have gone this way; they must be up there somewhere. Five strong men."

The illustrious blood of the *conquistador* laughed aloud at the thought of a mere five Indians. But the oblique Indian eyes suddenly narrowed with the birth of an idea. The negro lips smiled; and the man looked away. And then suddenly he gave in with ready shrug and outflung hands.

"As the *señor* wills. *Bueno.* What matter?"

And he shoved the revolver back into his pocket with ostentation.

"*Vamonos.* Let us go back and set those dogs to work."

Templar was young and he was a C. E. His training had been to judge figures and strains and pressures, not the subtle minds of men. He set himself to the work of clearing away the choked flume and connecting pipe lengths with a feeling that all was well with the world; and Diego assisted him with a right good will.

HE SPENT the morning cursing the paucity of labor. Six lazy peons were miserably slow, he swore. Now that all difficulties were removed, with twice as many workmen the treasure would be laid bare twice as fast. So that afternoon, after the lunch hour, he saddled his mule.

"I ride to the town to bring more peons, *señor,*" he said. "And, *carramba,* a taste of *aguardiente* will not hurt me. I have worked more than in my life before, and this weesky of the *señor* my partner I do not like. *Adios!* By nightfall I return."

Templar did not really need any more peons. The work of joining pipe was easy; no more than a two-man job. Still, with more men, they could be shown how to work in pairs and so lay the required mile or so of pipe with a great saving of time. And then, as he had said, there would be nothing to do but sit down and wait for the lake to empty itself. So he whistled a discordant popular chorus while Diego rode down the gorge toward Cuzco.

Toward was strictly accurate. Diego of the illustrious and unforgiving blood of de-Soto turned the bend of the cañon; and then the oblique eyes narrowed downward and the thick lips grinned in a snarl.

"Fool!" was all his comment.

He drew the cheap revolver from his pocket and made very sure of the load.

Down the gorge toward Cuzco he rode. But no further. In the opening valley below, where the mountainsides were not so precipitous, he tied his mule to a boulder and searched the barren slopes for a possible means of ascent. It was not difficult. By slanting along the face and zigzagging a couple of times he could reach to where he knew there must be the remains of the old Inca road. If only that were not broken down at some sheer precipice—he grinned in vindictive anticipation—he would run that wicked old fox to earth and settle the hereditary account once for all.

His luck seemed to be with him, for which he devoutly thanked St. Jago of Quito, who apparently had assisted his ancestors to many bloody victories. The ancient road was still traceable; a moldering foot-path, dipping down and climbing up to avoid fallen rocks and landslides; but a path that showed signs of regular use by naked feet. He followed it warily, without much trouble; a thousand feet above the dim gorge where his glorious ancestor fought while the gold that was his heritage was hidden by a priest of the sun. He looked down on the scene, and his grin was nastily predictive. Well, today he would finish that fight; and then, all obstacles removed from his path, the heritage would be his. All was as it should be.

His one anxiety was that when he rounded the bend of the spur he would be in full view of that interfering *Americano* who worked like a fool at the lake, and of whom he was for some reason afraid. But the favor of St. Jago remained with him. Just as he was reaching the very apex of the angle and regarding with interest the outcrop of painted dolomite, he craned his neck cautiously around a corner and found himself looking into the mouth of the great cave.

On the instant he stopped dead, like a stalking feline, moving not an inch. Only his narrow eyes flickered. Slowly, behind cover of his rock, he crossed himself and murmured a fervent *Diogracias* for that he had advanced with caution. For there, in a sunny spot, wrapped in his faded poncho, with his head bowed on his knees, squatted the aged wizard himself.

He was evidently asleep, wearied out with watching and conniving to guard his sacred trust against these invincible white men. It was not from this side that he had expected one of them. Diego's grin was that of a wolf with up-drawn lips as he crept with infinite caution up to his prey. With the crunch of his feet upon the gravel as he made his final rush, the old man awoke.

He was able to give only one terrified squeal before Diego's brown fingers closed on his throat and a bony knee pressed into his stomach. His withered old muscles were helpless. Only his eyes could roll as he clawed feebly at the choking pressure on his throat. His captor growled through his teeth and worried him.

"S-s-so, dog's dog; this is where you hide? Good. This saves much time and trouble. What my fathers started, I now finish."

He spoke in Aymara, which he pronounced with as faultless a diction as the old man himself; and on the other hand his rage was as cold-blooded as might have been the de-Soto himself. It was the one hundredth of *conquistador* blood that was dominant now. The illustrious scion of the white devils who had come up out of the sea had quite persuaded himself that this thing was a personal and a hereditary feud; and as a feudist he was quite justified in killing his enemy wherever he found him. He drew the cheap revolver from his pocket and cocked it.

The old man's eyes fixed themselves in the stare of dull Indian apathy and he ceased to struggle, though his fingers still clawed at the choking grip on his throat. Then a thought came to his executioner.

"*Carramba*," he muttered. "Better within your own cave, devil-doctor, where that interfering *Americano* down below may hear no report and make perhaps a fuss."

With that he proceeded to drag the old man into the inner gloom as he would a sheep or a doll or some other feeble and resistless thing. The cave was wide and high-vaulted, and the floor was as smooth as a road. Fallen stalactites of more recent times made a twisty path of what had once been a broad causeway; but the path was well trodden and clear. Diego looked for a convenient passage or arm not too far from the daylight where the echoes of his shot would be effectually blanketed. A little way ahead to his right just such a dim opening was visible. Good. Without effort he dragged his victim into it. No better place could be found for an execution.

AND then hands fell upon him. Countless tearing, snatching fingers and clutching bare feet. Dim forms beat at him from every side. His nostrils were assailed by the strong goaty odor of the never-washed Indian of the high Andes.

The revolver went off of itself; and one of the dim forms screeched horribly and fell and lay coughing. But they were powerful men who fought with him; their muscles had been well hardened by plenty of labor; and their hate had been well nourished by much experience of those who contracted for their labor.

Diego who would have been an executioner felt a filthy rag forced into his mouth and greasy llama-wool ropes winding themselves round his arms and legs and chest. He was as helpless in those quick-clutching hands as the old man had been a minute before in his own grip. In a very short space of time he was trussed like a llama for the slaughter; and the dim forms stood up breathing heavily. Four strong men, and a fifth who twitched and coughed on the floor.

The frail form of the witch-doctor appeared at the dim opening of the passage.

"Bring him," he ordered simply.

The four who smelled like peons picked

him up and followed their wizard. The old man shuffled ahead in silence, and silently the men followed. Into the inner gloom the old man led the way. The cave seemed to be endless. In the distance Diego thought he could hear running water; but he could see nothing. The cavern was pitch dark now. The old man seemed to be bearing to the right. Behind him the peons lurched and staggered with their burden over the floor they could only feel with their toes.

At last the old man stopped and fumbled in the dark. His aged lungs wheezed as he strained at something. There was a sound of heavy stone grating on stone; and a dim light began to grow on the group. With it, the sound of water came clear and unmistakable.

Still without a word the men stepped through an opening hewn square out of the rock. They were in a further great chamber or passage which stretched away into the gloom before them. Diego, trying desperately to retain his sense of direction, thought that this inner chamber must run parallel to the face of the cliff. Then he saw the cause of the light, and knew that he was right. High up, through a jagged cleft, a ray of sunlight streaked down and made an irregular oval patch on the floor.

The wizard pointed a shrunken claw at a square-hewn stone seat, or table or whatever it was; and without a word the peons laid their burden upon it.

Still the wizard pointed. The peons seemed to understand. Great copper rings were let into the sides of the square slab. Without question they took their plaited llama-wool girdles which every peon carries, and forced their captive's hands and feet down to the rings and lashed them fast. Diego struggled with desperate terror as his bonds were loosened; but it was quite useless. They were four strong men. He was left in an excruciating position, drawn taut on his back, able to move only his head and his eyes.

Then at last the witch-doctor spoke. A single word. He pointed to the square hole which led into the outer gloom.

"Go," he ordered.

Without a word the four passed out of view. The old man followed, and there came again the sound of stone grating upon heavy stone.

Executioner and victim were alone.

AMAMU the Soothsayer came back and stood looking at the prisoner whom his shrewd lure had brought to him. Long and thoughtfully he looked. There was no rancour in his expression; no hostility. Rather, an impersonal appraisal. Besides that, the withered old parchment face held no expression at all. Only the shrewd old eyes glowed as brightly as a cat's. And then the old man nodded slowly to himself.

He passed out of view again behind the prisoner's head; and only the flop and shuffle of his sandals were proof that he was busied with something. Diego, bound, helpless, gagged and stretched taut, paid during the next half-hour for all the many things that he had done to helpless Indians—and they had been *many*.

That awful impassivity! That silence! No abuse; no bullying; no gloating—all of which he would have understood— Just calm, expressionless scrutiny! There was a hideous suggestion of something duly prepared for, inevitable, which would happen without fuss or flurry.

Behind him he could hear the ancient soothsayer shuffling about engaged in some occupation. Beyond that somewhere, the rush of water. Rolling his head to one side, he could see, dimly outlined, the massive square of the entrance which seemed to be hewn out of the rock. Stretching on either side as far as he could see was a long shelf or bench, also hewn out of the rock wall and apparently carved with a design of winged human forms. He could not discern and he was in no condition to care. Besides that, emptiness—and the patch of sunlight on the floor.

Straining his eyes over to the other side, he could find nothing of comfort. Dim stone benches again apparently; short and square-cut; between them, tall stone figures which towered up into the gloom. Behind these, cut into the stone wall with extraordinary cleverness, so that the most possible light might be reflected from its polished angles and facets, a great circle with wavy lines radiating from it. Besides that, emptiness.

An awful horror surged cold over the wretched man. His heritage of negro was strong enough to conjure up hideous visions or juju ceremonies and voodoo deviltries; and the thin tinge of white had been strained through far too many cross-currents to carry with it any of the stern fortitude of the illustrious de-Soto.

He strained himself desperately to scream; to summon help; to compromise; to beg for mercy. But only the horrid muffled sound of a well-gagged man issued from his lips.

The ancient soothsayer shuffled into view once more; but he paid not the slightest attention to the moaning, struggling figure on the stone table. He continued coldly, methodically busy with his affairs. He was transfigured.

Mamu the priest of the sun, wore instead of the shapeless felt hat with ear-laps, an enormous headdress of feathers; a crown it was, of brilliantly bejewelled humming-birds' breasts with a great circle of radiating egrets' plumes, full six feet in diameter. In place of the faded-crimson poncho was a cloak, also of feathers, thousands of them, woven with amazing patience into a gorgeous garment. It was old and it was bare in mangy patches; but the merciful gloom smoothed away all defects. The relics of a glory that once had been were there. At the priest's shrunken breast hung a disk of metal, dully yellow, upon the face of which was carved the same emblem of the circle with the radiating lines.

From the bound man came convulsive moans. The only notice which the ancient priest vouchsafed was to look critically at the patch of sunlight which crawled slowly toward the stone as the sun outside set lower in the western sky.

With awful aloofness he shuffled about his occupation, a fantastic djinn of the underground. He was busy at one of the short benches between the tall stone gods. He braced his frail strength against the outer edge of the seat; and with a dry grating the whole top swung up on a pivot. It was a stone coffer such as many which lay about the ruined walls of Cuzco—though Diego had never known that they might have had counterbalanced stone lids. With the horror of extreme terror, he was unable to refrain from watching the ominous preparations for he didn't know what.

The invested priest groped in the dry unused depths and drew therefrom a long sliver of a shiny black material which glittered like glass. It was the shape of a spear blade with a short carved handle. There was reverence in the old man's handling of it.

It was obsidian. Volcanic-glass; chipped and polished down to the keenness of a broken bottle. A sacrificial knife such as the high-priests of the sun were wont to use to cut the hot hearts out of living maidens in the old days before the white men came up out of the sea and destroyed the great pyramid temples.

But the helplessly bound descendant of those white men was mercifully ignorant of its use.

STILL in deadly silence, the descendant of those high priests shuffled over to the stone table and looked down on his victim. The victim writhed, and all but spoke aloud with his boggling eyes. The priest continued to look, withered, emotionless, cold. Then he looked at the patch of sunlight, now horribly near. Slowly he nodded.

He shuffled off and came back with a broken and rusty knife blade and reached a yellow claw to his victim's breast. The victim heaved horribly and strained his bound limbs till the joints cracked. But the priest only leaned over and cut the khaki shirt away from the left side. Then he squatted himself down in the patch of sunlight, and so waited.

Slowly, as the sun set, the patch moved toward the stone table; and with it the ancient feather-bedecked Nemesis crutched himself forward on his arms to keep within its radius. Slowly, inexorably, inevitably the light advanced. No power on earth could stay its deadly march.

At last, as if it had dropped whole inches suddenly, it threw a long line of brilliancy along the edge of the table. Mamu, the hereditary priest, rose to his feet with creaking joints and stood in the full glare of the beam. A full minute he stood staring open-eyed through the high cleft in the cave wall at his resplendent god. Then he stretched his two withered arms out to it, holding the blade in his open palms; and then at last he spoke. His thin voice, full of faults and reedy trebles, began to intone a wailing chant:

"*Illappa, Illappa. Inti ccama arajpacha. Achachi-pa isapañim.* Supreme Lord, hear thy ancient servant."

The cracked old voice rose and fell in its invocation.

Diego, helpless, chilled with a nameless horror of he did not knew what, listened with awful fear bulging from his eyes. Much of the chant there was that he could understand. The ancient ritual had been handed down from father to son through the long ages; and with each handing more and more of the popular idiom had crept in. Still, he was in a vague horror about what it all meant till the officiating priest laid a shrunken left hand upon his bare breast and cried in the ecstasy of offering:

"The sacrifice that is required is ready, O Sun. Lord Sun, be ready to receive——"

Then a merciful providence caused the senses of Diego of the blood of the first conquerors to pass from him.

THE sun had duly set and darkness was growing over the little camp in the valley. Templar pulled at his pipe uneasily over the folding dinner-table and grumbled.

"I wonder what the deuce is holding Diego. He said he'd be back this evening, and here's darkness upon us. How in blazes does he think we're going to hold these peons, I'd like to know."

Mr. Tony Lepanto nodded with solemn importance and muttered—

"Aw they'll be all ri'."

Templar looked at him hopelessly. Small prospect of help there. Yet some sort of provision must be made. He tried to impress the need on his employer's befuddled mind.

"For Mike's sake, Mr. Lepanto, get a hold on yourself and try to get this. We're in a fix. Now listen. If Diego don't show up in another hour or so I'm going to sleep in his tent. Now see if you can't hold off from another drink tonight and keep your wits about you. I'll have the cook sleep here; and he'll wake you if he hears those Indians making a getaway up the ravine. We've got to hold these boys, or we'll be held up again with no labor."

After grave consideration Mr. Tony Lepanto saw the point.

"Aw ri'," he agreed. "I won' take any more. On'y jus' a night cap."

And he pushed the bottle from him with such good will that it fell over the edge of the table and broke on the stones below. He looked at the mess with slow comprehension and cursed the cook. Then:

"Nev' min'," he said generously. "I got plenty more."

So night fell, and Templar moved down to Diego's tent, and placed reliance on the cook. And that night the devils howled high among the crags in lusty celebration. And the next morning the sun smiled down on a camp of just three people.

Templar awoke his employer with a very set look on his face. Obstacles were bringing out the latent character of the young man. He was responding to the need.

"Well, Mr. Lepanto," he announced grimly. "They've gone."

Mr. Lepanto was sober enough in the morning to understand.

"Well, what're you going to do?" he asked. It was noticeable that he was letting all the responsibility rest on the shoulders of his engineer.

"There's just two things we can do," Templar told him with decision. "Diego's gone. I don't know when he'll be back. I've a notion he's sore and has gone off on a bust. He may be days. Now I can ride into Cuzco and try to rustle up some peons; but I imagine that won't be easy. Those birds who've beat it will have told the tale of their haunt and the whole labor market will be shy. And anyway, I don't feel like wasting all that time."

Mr. Tony Lepanto regarded the problem dully. The prospect did not look bright—

"Well, what's the second choice?"

"The second choice is—" Templar spoke with snappy determination—"that you buckle down and help me get ahead with this job. It's easy," he hastened to explain. "Everything's all set. My pump is rigged; all the pipe is laid down in position. We've only got to thread up. It's a two-man job; and I figure that a little work will be good for you anyway."

Mr. Lepanto by no means relished this second choice; but the thought of the money he had gambled was a powerful factor. His face was heavy with disgust.

"Gee, it's a fierce cold sort of a job," he grumbled.

Templar's point was won.

"Come ahead," he said. "Keep sober for a few days, and we'll be through. In three days we can finish the job, and then you can go to Cuzco and take it easy while the lake empties itself."

So once again the work progressed. And this time with quite a satisfactory speed. Templar was young and energetic, and he had quite an expert's knack in handling pipe. He kept his assistant down to the job with a steady grind that would have occasioned loud outcry and strikes among honest working men. Mr. Lepanto groaned and sweated in the cold; but he did assist—some; and he didn't drink—much.

Between the two of them the pipe was actually joined up. The pump was connected. The suction started. And, with the favor of the gods of labor, the thing worked. Even without tramping down the valley, round the bend of the spur, and down the gorge for two long miles to see what was happening at the other end of the pipe, they could hear the low, rushing sound of water under pressure.

The lake that covered the treasure was emptying itself out at the rate of five hundred gallons per minute. Templar snatched at his head to throw his hat into the air; but hat there was none. He had long since lost it. So he jumped high in the air instead and shouted the old football yell of his college. He even slapped his employer-assistant on the back and jubilated with him.

"It goes! By golly, it goes! All we got to do now is sit by and watch her dwindle. When she sinks down to the bottom of this end of the pipe, I'll just join on another section, start up the pump to fill her up, and let her rip once more."

Mr. Tony Lepanto was so exhilarated that he forgot for the moment to curse his partner for his absence. But the more he thought over things, the more convinced he became that the partner hadn't acted right and that his remuneration should be curtailed in proportion.

"Got the durn thing going without his blasted help, huh. I'll see where he pays for this. Wouldn't worry me if he never showed up now. Don't deserve a cut-in anyhow."

The thought that he would have a legitimate excuse to mulct his partner of a certain percentage, coupled with the pleasing reflection that he would not be called upon to gamble much more—if any—expense money before he saw his dividends waiting to be picked up out of the ooze, cheered him considerably. An ominous sign for future trouble. But it was nothing new. Men had known the same thing before. It was the beginning of the gold-fever.

So cheered was Mr. Lepanto by his reflections that he celebrated the occasion, plentifully and well.

* * *

AND Mamu the Soothsayer craned his neck like a condor and wondered what all the joy was about. He could see nothing happening. The water from above his sacred lake was diverted and was flowing merrily down the flume. He couldn't help that. Choking up the entrance, he knew, was of very little use. It occasioned only a small delay. And delay and harassment and lack of labor made no difference to that terribly persistent young man who seemed to meet every difficulty. He had feared that that invincible person would devise some means of blasting a vast gash out of the valley clear to the lake bottom. But after that first miracle no further such catastrophe had occurred. And now they sat still and made merry. What did it mean?"

So merry did the older one make that he was quite unable to ride to Cuzco and do the event the justice that it deserved. Which explained how he happened to be grandiloquently present two days later when Templar pointed to indentations and discolorations along the lake shore and insisted that they had not been visible before.

Mr. Tony Lepanto stared owlishly and grumbled that he saw nothing. He was impatient with the ignorance of the layman. How long would the durn thing take to empty out?

"How long? Why, gosh almighty, man. We're getting five hundred gallons a minute more or less. Now I make a round estimate that this lake holds at least twenty-five millions. Work it out for yourself."

The layman thought hard for many minutes. Then he said—

"Yes, I s'pose so."

So Templar planted a stick in the water and marked the level and told him to wait a few days and see. A lake didn't show an appreciable decrease that quickly. Yet it *was* emptying out. Slowly but surely the treasure was coming nearer. In a few days the decrease was apparent to anybody's eye.

It was apparent to the keen old eyes of Mamu the Soothsayer. Even from his height he could see that his lake was becoming distinctly less. He was appalled at the horror of it. What had these terrible white men succeeded in doing? That pipe thing that led down the valley; it must mean something.

With trembling limbs he scrambled along the path to peer down into the dark gorge.

He could discern the end of the pipe-line but faintly; but there was no mistaking the clear stream of water that shot from the end, a good fifteen feet out under the pressure which the drop into the gorge had created.

With the dominant impulse of the Indian in grief, old Mamu squatted down on his heels and bowed his head upon his knees. He felt very old and alone and helpless. After all his striving; all his plotting; after his final great sacrifice. Still the inexorable work went on. What could a frail old man do against these terrible people?

The impulse came to him, as it had come before, to give up and go away. Always had these white men vanquished his people. What use struggling? But Mamu had qualities which came with a long line of clean heredity. He had what white men call traditions. The sacred trust of his fathers was not a thing to be deserted as long as strength was left to fight.

He rose once more to his feet with renewed courage and clambered the path back to his rock. There he raised his weary old arms to the sun and called as he had called before:

"*Illappa, Illappa! Achachi-pa sutima!* Thy servant calls."

And the Lord Sun heard, and warmed his frail old bones and gave him—hope.

Templar looked up at the wailing cry, as he had looked before; and he laughed. He was free from care. What could happen now? Yet—as he laughed there was a vague uneasiness in the back of his mind. That old witch-doctor had proved to be a wily and a resourceful adversary. He found himself wondering, apropos of nothing, what had become of Diego. Surely the wildest debauch in the world must have come to an end by now. But his spirit had the resiliency of youth. He shook off the passing cloud and laughed again.

But Mr. Tony Lepanto shook an unsteady fist up at the wailing figure and muttered that that guy gave him the willies, and he would like to take a good crack at him.

Then the sun set behind the mountain tops, and Mamu the Soothsayer stepped away from his rock and into his cave with hope burning hot in his heart. Lord Sun had sent him a thought. Straight to the chamber of the stone gods he went, and straight through the darkness to where he knew he would place his hand on a torch. Four hundred years of heredity and his own long life had made that place familiar to every one of his five senses.

He struck a spark with a *jeuque*, a circular piece of flint with two holes drilled in it through which a string passed, by means of which it could be rotated as a small boy does a button; a simple mechanism which has the flint and steel of our own pioneers beaten a hundred times, both for intensity and temperature of spark.

Sticking the torch in a hole drilled in the rock, he opened the largest of the ancient stone coffers and pored over the contents; a hopeless looking tangle of strings. Red and blue and yellow they were, with secondary shades of green and yellow and brown; knotted and looped and re-knotted. An unravelable mess.

Yet Mamu the Soothsayer squatted before the mess and sorted the main tangles and counted knots and compared colors and lengths, and puzzled over things that his fathers had already forgotten. This was the history of his people. The *quipus* of the Inca.

Much there was that he couldn't understand. His fathers had forgotten, and their fathers had lost much before them. Yet a part of the ancient lore had come down to old Mamu; and half the night he sat up and pored over the knowledge of the wise ones who had been before him.

Patiently he reconstrued the dead past. And as he studied color and string and knot, his weary old eyes began to glow once again like a cat's and his drooping head picked up a new alertness.

He read anew the tale of the great waterfall and of the prophecy and of the building of the conduits and—here he suddenly tensed—he read how the fall had come to be regarded as an object of superstition by the untutored laity because it plunged into the earth and followed a natural fissure to burst forth in the lake below; and how the fissure connected with an arm of his own cave—which was after all but a part of the same great erosion of lime salts—and how the engineers of the Inca, forever looking for sources of water supply for the city of Cuzco perched so high on a barren mountain scarp, had found a way to connect this fissure with another one by cutting a trench and damming the original flow, and had so diverted all that water to feed one of the main conduits of the city.

It was enough. The inspiration that the Lord Sun had sent him had led true to its preordained consummation. The soothsayer sat all a-tremble, blinking at his torch, the sixth that had burned to a stump while he read. Suddenly he jerked himself to action. He snatched the torch and scuttled off down the twisty extension of the chamber of the stone gods. The water was there, of course. He drank from it habitually; but he had never followed that cross-passage to see where it went. Now he found that there was a regular path; steps had been cut to make it easy. The direction, too, was out toward the face of the cliff, which meant toward his sacred lake. Nor was it far. He quivered when he came to another intersecting passage, narrow and steep, the floor of which had obviously been hewn out and deepened by human agency.

At the point of intersection, just where the underground stream would have plunged into a steep chute, the water foamed against great blocks of laid stone and doubled back on itself to follow the artificial aqueduct. As his fathers had written with string, so was it indeed.

Mamu, servant of the sun, could give no thanks where no sun was to be seen. But he made reservation for a very special ceremony with the first rising of the next morning. For the present there was work to be done. Careful work and dangerous; for the surface where he trod was coated with a slippery scum from the undried spray of ages. Work such as might be done by four strong men. Mamu went to summon the slaves of his will with a holy zeal.

AS ONCE before, Templar awoke with a feeling that all was not well. Nor did he have to search his memory or even stick his head out of his tent to know that something was very wrong indeed. He had gone to sleep with the splash from the overflow of his flume. Now he awoke with the roar of a torrent tearing down the valley.

He dressed more quickly than ever in his life and stepped out. And stood paralyzed. The flume was there all right. It delivered its little stream as before. Nothing came into the lake from above. But over the lip where he had blasted foamed a small river.

That sick feeling of tasting his own heart came to him. His feet were lead as he went into his employer's tent and shook him. His shouted message brought the latter to his feet with a bound, cold sober for the time being. In his pajamas he rushed out and stood gaping at the catastrophe, careless of the cold.

And just then the sun crept over the high peaks and the thin wail that they had learned to dread floated down to them—

"*Illappa, Illappa!*"

Both men threw their heads back and gazed at the portent, trying to understand.

"*Illappa!*" the grotesque figure shrieked, and writhed in an ecstacy of adoration. "*Inti ccama arajpacha.*"

Tony Lepanto swore in hot blood and ground his teeth with a feeling of impotent rage:

"Blast my soul and knock me for a dead 'un if that —— old scoundrel hasn't put this over on us. Curse him; I'm gonna fix him for this."

There was much more to the same effect. Mr. Tony Lepanto had already shown that he was not such a very good sport when his gamble was not going well. But this outburst was a revelation. The man's face was bloated with rage added to his permanent debauch and his neck muscles swelled alarmingly.

Templar was upset enough himself in all consciousness; but he could see the need of relieving some of that apoplectic pressure.

"He's done something, I'll bet," he agreed. "I don't know what. But I can darn well go and find out."

"How?" snapped the other.

"I guess I can get up that chimney where the peons went. There's nothing to it. Somewhere up there's the trouble; and I'm going to find out."

The chill of the morning bit through the financier's rage, and he remembered his clothes. He turned to his tent and snarled over his shoulder—

"Just half a minute then, and I'll come with you."

Templar remonstrated. The climb was a stiff one, he argued, and——

"And what?" came an angry bellow from within the tent. "Y' think I can't make it. I'm sober, ain't I? And I'm gonna get a crack at that mangy pup if I die for it."

Templar saw that argument was useless with that alcoholic temper; so he shrugged agreement.

"All right then; it's your funeral. Better bring your flash-light 'cause that cleft seems to duck right into a sort of tunnel higher up."

Another growl was all his response. In a few minutes the other came out, dressed and steady enough on his feet. Templar had nothing to say. He led the way in silence, past the flume, over the shelf above the lake and up the rubble-strewn slope. Arrived at the chimney he suggested shortly:

"You better go first. Maybe I can give a boost from below, and perhaps save a fall."

His employer only growled something about Hades, and lost no time in commencing the ascent. He was willing enough in his resentful desire to reach the cause of his trouble. But his physical condition was not favorable to hard exercise. Within thirty-five feet his back began to go limp from pressing against the opposing wall, and his stertorous breath came in groans.

Templar got under and gave a shoulder to his wabbly feet. They rested heavily on him, and then made another struggle. Fortunately for both of them respite was not far. A shelf gave Heaven-sent relief.

The ex-rum-runner lay on his stomach, spread-eagled and breathing in great sobs. For the first time in his life he wished that he had let the stuff alone a little more. The labor of his lungs was excruciating pain. His head rolled as his body swayed to his inhalations, and he felt that he was going to die. Templar sat with his feet dangling and panted distressfully enough himself; and he could realize how the other felt.

But gradually even the financier's system reasserted itself. He was able to sit up, though his head still lolled limp. It was minutes before he could spare breath for speech.

"Oh ——!" he gasped. "Sweet Judas, what a climb! Phew! Curse the soul of that old scoundrel. Gosh!"

With shaking hand he pulled a flask from his pocket and took the customary stimulant. It braced his nerves as well as his vindictive will to go on. The chimney-cleft cut sheer into the cliff and the shelf followed it at a steep angle. Within some forty yards the cleft turned sharply to the left and narrowed. The bottom closed up rapidly and the roof converged, forming the tunnel that Templar had expected. It was steep and irregular, but nothing in comparison with what they had just passed. Yet the flabby leader had to pause more than once to gasp for breath and refreshment.

Templar did not like it. The man would be drunk again soon at that rate, and then he would have a problem on his hands indeed. But argument was useless, of course. All he could do was to urge the need of speed.

A FAINT light showed ahead. Mr. Tony Lepanto summoned his energy for a last spurt which carried him to the surface of a dim grotto. There he sat and recovered once more—and incidentally finished his flash. Templar helped him to his feet, and together they stepped out to the source of the light. They found themselves in the jaws of a passage which opened out into the main floor of the cave.

"Ss-so," muttered Templar, just as the last man who came there had done. "This is where he hides? Now what?"

"In!" said the other with decision. "That's where the crook hangs out."

He was brave enough physically, was Mr. Tony Lepanto, as one of his profession had to be. Without more ado he blundered ahead toward the inner darkness. Templar caught his arm.

"Easy now," he warned. "We don't know what's ahead."

"Easy ——!" growled Lepanto.

The drink was beginning to take hold again and he was bellicosely anxious to come to grips with this savage who interfered with the smooth running of his sporting gamble. But he had sense enough to ease his lumbering footsteps.

Together they advanced up the cave, Lepanto always in the eager and not very steady lead, Templar trying to restrain him. It began to be dark enough to need artificial illumination. Templar produced his flashlight and threw its white beam around. Nothing but dark emptiness. Vast jagged walls and stalactite-studded ceilings. He began to experience the eery feeling that comes with exploring the unknown bowels of the earth.

A square of dim light began to show far ahead and to their right. It was suggestively awesome. Templar felt himself tingling all over. But the bootlegger lurched boldly ahead. Suddenly Templar gripped his arm again. In the sweeping arc of his light something had moved. He tried to throw the beam on it again. His fleeting impression had been of a man or men.

"What in blazes is eatin' you?" Lepanto growled.

Then he gave a sudden whoop and grabbed Templar's arm in his turn to point.

In the dim square of light stood the old witch-doctor himself peering out at the intruders on his sanctuary. With a yell of savage delight Lepanto rushed at him, his feet regaining the sudden amazing steadiness of a half-drunken man under the stimulus of excitement. Templar followed. By the time they gained the chamber of the stone gods the old man had, or course, disappeared. But away in the descending gloom to the right, above the noise of rushing water, they heard bare footsteps pattering on the rock floor.

Lepanto yelled again and charged down in that direction, Templar after him once more, hating to leave the unknown menace of the men in the rear, but loyally bound to stand by.

As they ran, the advantage began to be theirs. Old Mamu in the lead, besides being old, was in darkness. To make his case worse, after he passed his place of drinking, the uneven floor was new to his feet.

The pursuers overhauled him rapidly. His scrambling figure began to be visible in the beam of the flash light.

"Whoo-ie, come on! We've got him!" whooped Lepanto.

And just then he stumbled over a projection and fell heavily. He must have hurt himself hideously, for he cursed in agony as he heaved himself up to one knee and clutched the bleeding rent in the tough cord cloth of the other leg. Then, in a frenzy of exasperation, before Templar knew what he was about, he snatched a revolver from his pocket and fired at the flitting figure in front.

"Missed him, curse it!" he howled; and he struck savagely at Templar who tried to reach for the gun.

His eyes glared the madness of the chase coupled with the mounting fumes of his recent refreshment. He barely lurched forward in pursuit again before he slipped on the treacherous moist floor and crashed down on his face once more. This time the gun flew from his hand. It skittered down a slippery decline and plopped into the rushing stream.

But the scrambling figure ahead seemed to have come to a blind end. The flashlight showed him hesitant before a seeming abyss. Lepanto shouted his view-halloo again—though it was more than half a groan—and plunged forward to the capture.

Old Mamu stood revealed at the end of things. Before him was the cross cleft of the old channel. Great squares of stone thrown to one side blocked what had been the artificial aqueduct. From the dam that had been they had been removed, four deep from the center. The water boiled against the remaining buttresses and then glided with a clean *schloop* through the five-foot passage that had been made, and slipped with an oily smoothness down the chute that led to blackness and the lake.

Mr. Tony Lepanto lurched forward to his trapped quarry. His eyes glared the bloodshot hate of a liquor-inflamed brain and his lips curled in vindictive triumph.

"Now I've gotcher, you —— louse," he said thickly; and he reached a heavy, unsteady hand to grip the old man.

But the advantage was now once again with Mamu. He had light to see by—and he had bare feet with almost prehensile toes that could cling to every little crevice and protuberance of the rock. With a sudden turn and with amazing agility for so old a man he stepped out on to the remaining wall of the dam and hurled himself bodily at the other side.

FIVE feet across was the gap. No jump for a youth. But old Mamu was very old. On his hands and knees he landed and scraped agonizingly along on the further surface—but he landed.

Lepanto gave vent to a hoarse bellow and clutched wildly at the flying poncho. But the feet of Mr. Tony Lepanto were encased in hard leather soles. They shot from under him on the slimy surface of the dam. He shrieked just once, clutched desperately at nothing and fell into the exact center of the oily sluice.

The suddenness of the thing was appalling. A second—less than a second—and he had disappeared into the inky blackness of the underground.

Templar stood benumbed, vaguely waving his beam of light into a pit from which came up only the muffled roar of subterranean water. How long he stood, he never knew. A familiar sound reminiscent of menace impinged on his stunned senses:

"Illappa, Illappa. Isapanim."

Old Mamu the Soothsayer was breaking all precedent and giving thanks in the darkness to the sun for his delivery.

Then the cumulative horror of the thing gripped Templar. It surged over him in a cold wave. The clammy blackness of the inner earth; the insistent triumph of this old wizard from the very beginning; the awful undoing of those who sought to harm him—he had a horrible impression that he knew now what had become of Diego—and overlaying it all, the menace of those men he had half-seen in the gloom of the outer cave.

He turned and fled from that place. Not till he reached the outer air did he leave behind him the feeling of things clutching at his spine from the dark crevices of that awful cavern.

He was a silent, hard-faced man when he reached his camp in the valley of his wasted effort. Without explanation he gave orders to the bewildered cook to saddle up and ride with him into Cuzco. The job was through, was all he said. He would send for such gear as could be salvaged later. There was nothing else he could do. *The funds had ceased.*

Within fifteen minutes he was riding through the gloomy gorge headed for the open valley; and he called it as he rode—

"The camp of no regrets."

No regrets at all. Despite the fact of the gold that stayed in the lake. Despite the fact that he had run away from the dark. He was neither sorry nor ashamed. For he had learned two things, he vowed grimly, which would be of use to him.

One was that it was unsafe to regard a job in his profession as easy until it had been accomplished. And the other was the knowledge of a treasure and of the means of getting it. And some day, perhaps, he would go back—when Mamu the Soothsayer would have passed from the guardianship of the sacred lake to his ancestors who had guarded it before him. For he had learned to respect Mamu.

THEY CALL HIM AKWINIMI

by

ALANSON SKINNER

H*AU, pianun Nitawis!* Come in, my nephew. *Eh, ista!* You are covered with snow! Old woman, some of that hot soup in a big wooden bowl for our beloved relation! Take off your wet moccasins. There is the pipe and tobacco. You will sleep here beside my little grandchild, your cousin.

Wah, listen to the wind! You are brave to have come so far to see a poor, dirty old Indian, my nephew! This is the way we Menomini are accustomed to live. No wonderful fire from heaven to light our wigwams, no stone houses, only mats and barks and a good wood fire within. The younger generation has to have its log houses at the very least. In my time a man was at home where night found him.

Yes, we were *men* in those days! Up early in the morning before dawn with bow

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"They Call Him Akwinimi," copyright, 1924, by Alanson Skinner.

and arrow to follow the deer, and nothing to eat till nightfall when we got back, and often nothing then if we did not kill during the day. *Anâm*, dog! What a hard life; no Government rations or annuities to count on and keep one loafing!

Let me think. Yes, it was twenty-five years before the Treaty of Lake Pauwahikunay, when we ceded our lands, that they began to say that I was "In-Everybody's-Mouth." In those days it meant something. It was not a name to mumble but a title to strive for. It was our custom that he who was bravest on the warpath might have his name changed by the partizan on the return trip. Each clan had several of these brave names, that were filled only once in a life time, and Akwinimi was then "vacant" in the Bear Clan.

We of the people of the village of "The Pike Place"—Oconto, you call it still—were away on the Fall hunt. Some of us were a long way from home, attending to the chase; only the women, the old people, and the children were left behind at the wigwams on the sand-hills at the Oconto High Banks. It was peace then between all the Indians, but we Menomini should have known better than ever to trust the Yellow Earths.

Just about dawn the Sauk war-party encircled the village. When the first rays of light came the leader blew upon his reed whistle as a curlew cries, and they gave the war-whoop and dashed into our village. There was no one there to defend the women and children, only a few who were aged and ailing, so that there was never a shot fired nor an arrow loosed. At first the Yellow Earths were suspicious, and only a few of them entered the village, crouching to the earth and gripping their weapons. They peered into the wigwams and found many empty, but in some there were the women and the children whom we had left behind, and these they swiftly knocked on the head. Then they took courage, and looted the dwellings.

Now in my grandfather's lodge it happened that the old man remained with his brother, both too feeble to accompany us on the Fall hunt, and presently the Yellow Earths discovered them, and gave the war-whoop. Not for a moment did the old men cease their conversation with each other, not once did their hearts falter when the Sauk warriors dashed in and seized them.

"Look well at the Sun, you old dogs," cried the Yellow Earth braves as they dragged them out of the wigwam. "This is the last time that you will gaze upon him in the heavens!"

"*Hau*, brother," said my grandfather, whose name was The Acorn. "What these children say to us is perhaps the truth for once. Let us look at the Sun, and at the Earth our Grandmother. The Sun will shine on, and the grass will grow green as before, but we will not be aware of it. This is the time appointed."

"It is well," replied his brother, The Clear Sky. "In this manner I have always desired to die."

Then came the Yellow Earth war-chief. He seized the two old men by the hair and shook them with all his force.

"When you die it will be by fire," he snarled at them.

"*Hau! Inneh!* We thank you!" said the old men. "In such a way *men* can die without shame," they answered.

Then the chief ordered his young men to gather the dry mats of cat-tail flags from the wigwams, and they wrapped and bound the old men in them from head to foot. They were very angry, for there was a Menomini woman in one of the wigwams, a great strong woman of the Thunder Clan; and when two of the Yellow Earth warriors entered her lodge and seized her children to dash out their brains, she took a war-club away from one of them and knocked him on the head, so that he fell down and died, and she attacked the other and mortally wounded him, and escaped with their scalps and all her family, and was not to be found.

When the old men had been swaddled in the mats they were placed on a scaffold of green poles with their feet with the wind, and a brand was brought from a burning wigwam.

"If you will beg for your lives like dogs," said the chief of the Yellow Earths, "you may yet live. What have you to say?"

"Only do we desire to have our hands free that we may smoke our redstone pipes; that is all that we ask, being *men*," was the answer.

So the Sauk warriors allowed them to smoke their pipes, and they lighted the mats so that the fire crawled toward their vitals slowly. But there was scanty amusement in that for the Yellow Earths, for the old men ignored them and continued to talk to each other as if nothing had happened.

"I say, my brother, do you feel anything?" said my grandfather as the fire gnawed at his waist-line.

"Oh, I notice something. It is as if you were pulling out my hairs to leave a scalp-lock before going to war; it scarcely annoys me," was his answer.

And so in time they were consumed and died like Menomini. And the Yellow Earths saw how *men* could die, and were astonished.

NOW it was nearly a whole day and a sleep later that that brave woman who defended and saved her family arrived at our camp. She was nearly exhausted, for she had concealed her family and fled on to our camp on the Wolf River on foot all day and all night through the forest. She showed us the scalps and told us of the massacre and begged that we hurry back to have vengeance. But it takes time to collect men in the wilderness, and we were unable to get back to the Oconto High Banks to bury our dead before two more days. The whole village was in ruins and ashes. Here lay a mother surrounded by her family, and here a young warrior with his weapons still in his hands, with his heart torn out and eaten by those dogs! Yes, even I, who am a warrior, and accustomed to see hard and bitter things, was moved to tears at these sights.

In one place, riddled with arrows, lay the scalped body of my brother, one of the very few able warriors who had remained behind. And beside him lay a ball-headed war-club with the figure of a black dog or wolf upon it, and I knew that that was a message for me and the rest of his relatives to tell us that he had been slain by the great Yellow Earth chief, Black Dog, of the Wolf Clan. So I caught up the weapon and thrust it in my belt, and resolved that, as the Sun saw me and the Earth heard me, either Black Dog or I should die before the snow flew.

When we had finished our terrible task, then the war-bundles were opened and the songs that make us powerful, invisible and invulnerable were sung, and a dog feast was held. Then we started out, and our leader bore on his back the sacred war-bundle. You, nephew, have often seen our war-bundles as they hang from the lodge-poles. They are shrines that we carry to, but not into, battle. They consist of a white reed mat, wrapped around the white tanned skin of an unborn fawn, and they contain the tokens of the war gods and the charms and amulets that we rely on to assist us in battle.

These charms and amulets consist of the skins of falcons, of eagles, of swallows. The skins of weasels, the hides of snakes, the tails of buffaloes, and packets of roots and herbs. There are also cords to tie prisoners, magical war-clubs, rattles of deer-hoofs and reed whistles to blow upon to call the Thunderbirds to aid us in striking the enemy as the lightning rends the trees of the forest.

When we near the enemy the war-leader calls a halt, opens his bundle and sings his sacred songs to make the medicines powerful. Then to each warrior he gives something from his portable shrine. He who receives the hawk or eagle skin gains with it the power of that bird to swoop upon its prey. The weasel skin lends the courage, stealth and ferocity of that terrible little animal, and the snake hide makes its bearer as cunning and stealthy to slip through the grass as a serpent. The buffalo tail endows its bearer with the stubborn valor of a buffalo bull. The war-clubs have the power of the lightning to strike, and the medicines, chewed up and sprayed on the body, make one as hard to hit as the swallow, as invisible as the morning mist, and cause the bullets simply to flatten out against his skin, or heal his wounds immediately.

The war-leader stays behind and sings his magic songs to make these medicines all work, and the warriors attack, and as fast as they secure a scalp they race to bring it to the partizan and receive a reward and have their names recorded that they may be changed later. And know also that he who has the bundle in charge may not flee nor turn back on the warpath nor lay his bundle down, except only that his uncle or nephew be present, and, desiring to save his life or to prevent inconvenience, should they come to a stream or a forest, he may take the burden of the bundle upon himself and be free to change his course, or he may take his relative by the shoulders and turn him as he desires.

Now when we had reached the vicinity of the nearest Sauk villages our scouts, who were spying half a day's walk ahead, ran back with the news that we were close upon the enemy and that they were still dancing our scalps. So we went on with renewed caution, and when we were within sight of the village the partizan opened his bundle and prepared by singing the songs of his ritual and giving us our talismans. The men were to surround the village, wait all night and attack at dawn, as is our custom. Our hearts were still swelled up with anger, and we separated and surrounded the settlement and awaited the signal to charge upon them, which was to be given when the sun's first rays were seen.

In those days I was young and not overly given to caution; and presently, when I saw a Sauk warrior, fully armed, approaching me, I waited until he was directly before my place of hiding, then—perhaps I even forgot myself so far as to give the war-whoop; I have now forgotten—I leaped out and struck him down with a single blow of Black Dog's war-club.

But while I was yet bending over to take the scalp of this Yellow Earth they fell upon me from behind, four of them, and bore me to the ground. I must have been too excited over my victory to be on my guard, and now they had me powerless. With a hempen prisoner-tie ornamented with porcupine quills they bound me, having first taken my weapons away. My arms they lashed together at the elbows, passing the cord behind my back, so that one of them stood behind me holding the ends. Another one they placed around my neck like a collar, and in my hands they thrust a gourd rattle.

"Sing for us, you who have not so very long to live," they said mockingly.

And we turned our footsteps toward their village.

Well, I sang as they had ordered me, but it was one of the war-songs from the sacred bundle of Terrible Wolf, and I shouted as loud as possible, not only to let these Yellow Earths know that they had taken a *man*, but in hopes that there might be some one of our men in the neighborhood and they would hear and know that Weasel was a prisoner. Yes, that indeed was the way of it, as I found out by and by; but then there was no sign of anything but a croaking raven, and no sounds else but my song and the taunts of the Yellow Earths who had captured me.

NOW it so happened that we did not have far to go. I was much nearer to their camp than I had suspected. When we were near my captors began to whoop: "*Hôhau! Hôhau! Hôhau! Hôhau!*" and they came running from the camp, men and women. The first four to arrive struck me heavily, for thus they counted coup on me, and also on a white man's scalp that one of these Sauks bore on a stick. Among the Yellow Earths these coups are considered something to boast about. The others wanted to strike me also, from hatred, but the warriors who had me would not permit it.

"Now in a short time I shall gaze my last upon this Island, the Sun, and the Sky," I thought. "Presently I shall be among my ancestors."

However, I was still alive, the Sun was yet as warm as ever, the appearance of everything was real. In my heart there was no fear, only disappointment that I had not been able to keep my vow and kill that one, Black Dog.

Now those Sauk untied me and treated me very well. The man whom I had killed and scalped had no relatives there to demand my blood at once. The braves who guarded me gave me dried meat to eat and water to drink. So I remained, knowing that as the shadows lengthened I drew nearer to Death. I could already feel the glaring eyes of Pahkah fixed upon me.

By and by a crier went through the encampment and called out in a sing-song voice to the men that they were wanted at a council. Two of those who had taken me left; but two remained, armed and watchful. I was able to observe that there were about one hundred warriors in all in this village; and then one of my guards, who was willing to talk to me, told me that it was one of the principal bands of Black Hawk.

"Say, Yellow Earth," I inquired of him, "by what name do they call this one who is chief of your band? Is he a man? Does he wear scalp-lock fringes on his leggings?"

"Why, you Menomini dog, we Yellow Earths are not accustomed to being led by children! Naturally he is one who is known to your people and the white Long Knives who own you. 'Black Dog' is the title that you are accustomed to speak fearfully, when you refer to him! He is of the Wolf Clan, and you have heard him howl over meat that he stretched on the ground at Prairie du Chien and again at the mouth of the Peshtigo!"

"Anamekut, that dog-like one!" I thought in my heart. "Well, I am not ready to die when that one lives and moves on this Island."

Presently they came out of the council whooping and laughing. Some of them came to the wigwam where I was captive; others were busy gathering fagots and erecting a stake in the center of the encampment. A crowd of warriors entered the lodge, naked, painted horribly, some in black and some in white. Those in the black paint were the division of the Saukie called Oskush, who are required never to turn back when they have undertaken anything; those in white were the Kishko, upon whom rests no such requirement. These divisions are rivals in everything, a man entering one at birth, taking the opposite division from his father, the second son again going into the other division, and so on alternately. In this matter they would vie with each other in putting me to torment, I thought in my heart. Still, though they laughed evilly at me and jostled me, none as yet hurt me.

"At least I am still alive," was what I was thinking.

By and by there was the jingle of little bells, and every one stood aside. An evil-looking Sauk stooped low and entered the wigwam. By the light of the fire I could see that he was painted black over his naked chest; he wore deerskin leggings, skin tight, with a fringe of human hair. His head was shaved save for a roach standing over the crown, and over his head was the slit skin of a black wolf, the head lying on his broad chest, the tail dangling down his back. Customarily these Yellow Earths wear necklaces of grizzly-bear claws and otter fur when they are men of distinction; but this Black Dog, for I guessed that it was he, had probably never been able to find a dead grizzly.

"Well, braves, bind this rice-eater," I heard him order.

In a moment the thongs were upon me.

"It is not necessary to be afraid of me, O black eater of carrion," I said to him. "There are nearly a hundred of your warriors present with their arms!"

He glared at me savagely but made as if he did not hear me.

"What is it that your mother calls you when she desires to feed you mush?" he demanded.

Now it is not customary among our people to ask a man his name, and had I not been filled with anger I should have ignored him. As it was I swallowed my heart, which had swelled up into my mouth with rage, and answered:

"It is true that I am as nobody among my own people, O devourer of moldy bones, I who have only slain four Yellow Earths—" You should have seen their eyes pop when I made that boast, my nephew! Four was entirely too large a number for their stomachs!—"but Weasel is the nature of the title by which they are accustomed to call me!"

"Ha-ha! Weasel indeed? That humble, little, brown, short-legged animal? Why, that one is the most insignificant of the four-footed hunters! Eater of mice! Well, Weasel, summon your little stinking namesake to help you, you who are about to die by fire!"

"It is well!" I answered.

Whereupon there was an uproar and laughing among all of them. Only I noticed one old grayhaired warrior whose face was seamed with experience and whose chest was scarred with the marks of weapons in front, who mumbled:

"Not at all do I like this! They do not do well to mock at Weasel; that little animal is known to be terrible in vengeance."

"Ha, old man," I thought in my heart "if I live I am tempted to spare thee."

So they dragged me out, and now I saw that the fagots were heaped and ready. Some indeed were heating gun-barrels red hot to caress me. Then I preserved my calmness of countenance; but I cried in my heart:

"O Great Spirit, I ask Thee for life! O Thunderers, my ancestors, permit me to live to offer you more scalps of the Yellow and Red Earths' O little four-legged animal, my dream guardian, have you really forsaken me?"

My nephew, it is not necessary for you to believe me, yet I, who am your mother's brother, tell you in an Indian way that as I thought these things—yes, in that very moment—almost under my feet popped out a weasel! For an instant he regarded me, then ran forward, smelled of my moccasins and whisked away. In that moment

I knew that I had, as it were, returned from the land of the dead. My heart grew very strong!

"Come now, Menomini," said this Black Dog, my enemy. "Since you are about to die, sing us your death-song before weeping makes your voice husky."

"Yes, Yellow Earth, you whose sweethearts have furnished you with locks to fringe your legging in imitation of a warrior, I will sing a death-song for you! You shall learn who this Weasel is, and how and in what way he overtook your tribesmen and sent them to Nahpatao, the Chief of the Dead."

"*Hau, hau, hau, hau!*" shouted the Yellow Earths. "Let him tell us about his brave deeds, such as they are!"

"Well, in that case you must unbind my arms and feet. Not at all accustomed am I to speaking publicly in fetters!"

Whereupon a brave stepped forward and said:

"At the mouth of the Oconto River on Green Bay I released five Menomini children from life. Therefore do I now release this other Menomini."

Those dogs shouted, "*Haooo!*" in approval of his words; and I, I marked him well, in case I should ever have opportunity to revenge my relatives. I stretched my arms and cried:

"How is it, Yellow Earths; how do you expect me to tell you and act out for you my coups when I have no weapon? At least give me, who am as good as dead, a war-club to brandish."

There was a moment's pause, and then a roar of laughter went up as Black Dog elbowed his way to me.

"Here, my child," he said, "take this one that I took from a Menomini who left it behind in his hurry to cross the River of the Dead. Who knows? Maybe it was one of your relatives. I tell you, little dirty brown animal, that I have dashed out the brains of many of your relations, and of the Long Knives your masters with that weapon! It has a name now; we call it K'jimisihigun—The Brain-Splasher!"

My nephew, I started in horror! It was none other than the great war-club of Pogamagezhîk that my brother had used so desperately at the mouth of the Oconto! I snatched it eagerly.

"O sacred, Heavenly War-Club, you who defended my brother against the Yellow Earths again a *man* has you in his grasp! Allow me to glut my vengeance! O Thunderer, my totem, give me thy power to strike as the lightning! O Little Brown Terrible One, if I am to die let me take a few of these dogs with me to light my fires on the road to the hereafter! Let them say that he showed the Yellow Earths how a *man* could die!"

"*Ha-ha,*" they mocked. "His heart is turned to water! He prays to his totem and his guardian!"

"Hush," said the old brave whom I had noticed before. "These ones to whom he prays are powerful. It is in my heart that we release this man unharmed. It may not turn out exactly as you expect it to, my children!"

But his voice was drowned out with cries of:

"Let the Menomini begin! To the fire with him! Let us caress our little brother!"

"Hey there, clear a ring," said the warriors, forcing them back to give me space.

They were closely packed except on the side toward the stake, where it was too hot, and I noticed that, since they had come out to have sport with a prisoner, there was not a gun or a bow, and only knives and spears and clubs among them.

Then I waved my brother's war-club and commenced:

"I am called Weasel, the grandson of Clear Sky. He was the one who made the Red Earths tremble when he ventured abroad! It was impossible for them to swallow their food on the day that any one made mention of his name! Of Yellow Earth scalps he had sufficient to make a blanket for his dog to lie on! Terrible Eagle was the name of my father's father, and his father and grandfather before him were named Akwinimi—"In-Everybody's Mouth"—because of the deeds that they had performed. My great-grandfather was the one who assisted the Frenchmen to destroy the Foxes, the eaters of cast-off scraps, at Butte des Mortes!"

I was aware that these dogs did not like my speech, and I laughed secretly.

"As for me, not indeed very much have I struck the enemy. Always were the Yellow Earths too swift of foot for me to overtake them. Yet four times have I counted coups upon you, dogs!

"On the Rock River I overtook a fat,

pursy Yellow Earth, who, when I had leaped upon him, dropped his rifle and begged for mercy. But I had none; I am called Weasel, the blood-drinker; and I struck him over the head with a war-club similar to this one which I hold in my hand! He died weeping, Yellow Earths!

"In like manner I overcame the one whom you call Strutting Turkey! He was scouting our village on the Oconto. I saw him. Creeping up to him in the brush, I leaped upon him as I had upon the other. Thus did I seize him, and thus did The Brain-Splasher spatter his brains!

"The third one I slew also with a war-club! I knocked his very large shield from his hands, and my war-club drank his blood in this manner!

"And now for the fourth one! With my knife I thrust up under his ribs and pushed away from me, so that he fell without ever groaning. Thus did I stand over him, and so was I ripping off his scalp when four of your braves fell upon me!

"I am a man! I am ready to die right now! But not for nothing was I called Weasel! Four is the exact number of Yellow Earths that I have killed up to now, and before I die four more at least will I take with me! O Weasel, now is your opportunity to protect me! O Thunderers, make strong my arm!" I shouted; and, springing forward, I drove the heavenly war-club of my dead brother against the skull of the one who had loosed me.

Like a stone striking a rotten log was the way that it sounded as his blood spattered on the faces of those who were gathered around us!

"My name is Weasel, and this is the way that I am accustomed to do!" I cried, giving the war-whoop.

The Saukies were petrified with astonishment for an instant, and I struck the crowd of them on the side next the stake, where it was thinnest. I elbowed and hewed with my war-club, and twice more I heard its shattering impact as it crushed a human skull. I was through them, barking my war-cry! And now for the forest like the wind, while all was hubbub and confusion! Men were running for their guns and bows, women were screaming, children crying, dogs barking; but I did not look back, for I knew that there must be some who were brave and who had presence of mind at my heels!

YOUR Mother Metigwaki, the Forest, sheltered me. I was lost in the trees in a moment. No chance for an arrow or a bullet to strike as I dodged and leaped among the tree-trunks. The noise behind me died away to a confused murmur, and I paused to look back, thinking I had distanced them all. But no, a hundred yards behind followed Black Dog!

So it was man to man at last! Well, such is the way that warriors love to fight! None of this doglike gunpowder, no arrow to kill from a distance, but weapons in the hand, and at short range. Now I could come to the death grapple with the one I hated most, whose leggings were fringed with my brother's hair. But as I paused he was upon me, a buffalo shield in one hand, his knife in the other!

There were no words, no outcries. He flung himself at me snarling, like the Wolf his ancestor. He would have beat down my guard, but I sprang aside and struck down heavily with my club. It was a lucky blow, for though I missed his head and the blow was spent, it lamed his shoulder. But he was up and at me, bellowing.

I took the charge—his shield knocked up my war-club, and it flew from me. But my left hand caught his right wrist, and as he bore me to earth under him I seized his throat. Over we rolled, our legs flying. Now he was on top, now I was. His breath was hot on my face; our sweat mingled; our eyes never left each other!

Ah, nephew, youth is a good thing! He was the older man; though more seasoned, though heavier, I felt him weaken. I redoubled my efforts, but it seemed as if it were for nothing. Nearer his knife drew to my throat, nearer! Then I writhed uppermost, and the knife dropped from his hand and was lost in the moss.

But now both of my hands were free. I was almost blinded by my own blood where the blade had scraped me, all unconscious of the hurt, across my brow; you can see the scar. But my fingers found his throat. He thrust them loose, and my hands fastened on his shaven skull.

In desperation I twisted his head while his great fists beat me—ah, it gave! I saw through a curtain of red that the veins were bursting—slowly, slowly, the skull was revolving in my fingers—*crack*! Black Dog fell limply in my clutches. With the weapons that the Great Spirit had given me I had broken his neck!

Hah! It took me some moments to find his knife, and more to find my breath. For a moment I hesitated, for he *was* a man, although my enemy, and I hated to mutilate him. But the memory of my dead brother, swamped in his own blood by his own fireside, nerved me. I took his scalp.

Now in the distance I heard whoops and shouting. Figures were approaching among the trees on all sides. Escape was hopeless, and indeed my strength was all but gone. But I would die a man, so I stooped again. On his left side I slit a deep gash between his ribs. His heart, still warm and smoking, I tore from him.

"This body I feed you, O Sun and Thunderers! This blood I leave Thee, O Weasel, my Guardian! But I who am called after you, Weasel, *I* am a *man!* The Sun hears me; I eat the heart of this Yellow Earth, Black Dog, and thereby gain his courage!"

Then, nephew, it was as if my fire had gone out, and I fell across the body of my enemy. Yet even as I tottered there was the flash and roar of many rifles, the high-pitched yells of warriors, and the oncoming Saukies were met by my companions, the warriors of the Wild Rice Nation, hastening to my rescue!

Well, many were those who had heard my words as I fainted. There were Yellow Earth prisoners aplenty to tell of my conduct in the village, which, my comrades promptly wiped out. That was the last of Black Hawk, for we drove him and his men across the Mississippi, where our brothers the Sioux finished our vengeance.

Now on the way home, according to our custom, we stopped to rest at the place where we had our ceremony on the start of our war-party. The people of the village came there to meet us. Yes, the women came out also, to dance the scalps.

Our partizan, Terrible Wolf, at that time announced to them the victories of the party and told them what each of us had done and the new names that we had taken. Now of a truth there was no one, my nephew, who could even approach my deeds of valor. Eight Yellow Earths I had slain, and two I had scalped; moreover I had been taken prisoner, but had not only laughed in their faces before the stake, but freed myself with slaughter among the armed warriors, and had killed Black Dog with my naked hands!

But, nephew, I knew that I was as no one without my Helper; therefore I refused to take a new name.

"Let me still be known as Weasel," I told them. "I am a *man;* I do not need a new title. The Yellow Earths will know who I am!"

I danced there before them, my nephew, with the damp scalp of Black Dog in my hands. Giving the war-whoop, I told them how I had slain him. Yes, I enacted the combat before them, and they shouted, "*Haoo*" in approval. Then my little sister, your auntie, came forward, smiling in pride, and took the scalp from me, giving me a new suit of deerskin to wash the blood from my hands, and she danced with it.

"*Koowuh*, O people! Behold the scalp of Black Dog, chief of the Yellow Earths, murderer of my brother in time of Peace! Akwinimi — In-Everybody's-Mouth — was the one who finished him! Akwinimi, my elder brother!"

Hau, inneh, my nephew! That is the way of it! In this manner did they start to speak of me as In-Everybody's-Mouth, that ancient, honorable war-title. Four times has it been born in our family. But the Yellow Earths, they turn pale and say it in whispers, calling me in their tongue Pokitapawa, The Brain-Taker, after one of their gods who destroys evil souls on the Road of the Dead with his war-club, or sometimes they mutter rather 'K'jimisihigun, or The Brain-Splasher.

Now, nephew, you begin to know who I am. Let us sleep, for the skies are already paling, and the dawn approaches.

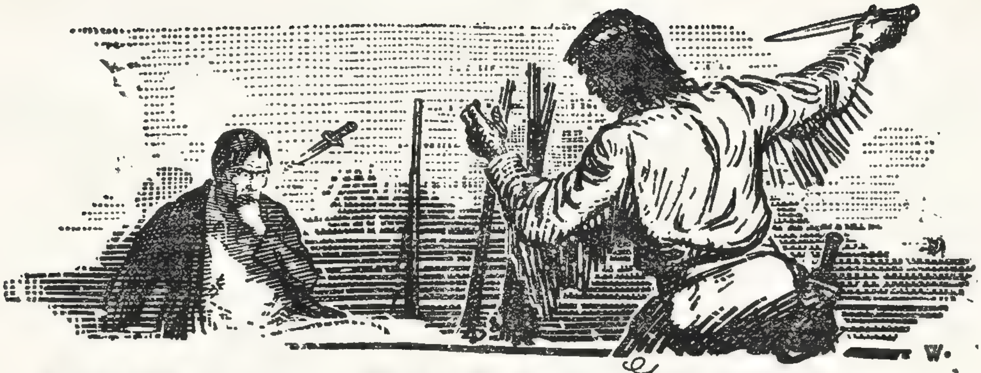
FIDS

by Harold Willard Gleason

BOOMERANG and assegai,
Bolo, dirk and kris,
Elegant, I don't deny,
To aid a swift decease;
But if you meet a bully-boy
Of whom you must be rid,
I highly recommend to you
The fid—
Fid! Fid!
The two-pound, bright steel, needle-pointed fid!

Tomahawk and simitar,
Bludgeon, ax and pike,
Sling and pistol, all go far
In riot, brawl or strike;
But long-range or throat-grips,
Skull or wrist or 'mid,
There's nothing like persuasion
With a fid—
Fid! Fid!
Be wary of a sailor with a fid!

Mates may swing belaying-pins;
Cowboys whirl lassoos;
Many men for many sins
Many weapons choose;
But he who signs to haul on lines
Will tell you, shifting quid,
"Talk gentle to a bucko
With a fid—
Fid! Fid!
Don't argue if you're up ag'in' a fid!"



RIFLE RULE

by HUGH PENDEXTER

A Five-Part Story · · Part IV

Author of "The Long Knives," "Old Misery," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IN 1856 when Kansas was torn between the pro- and anti-slavery men, Hale Watt, a young Southerner slipped quietly ashore from the river-boat *Pole Star* and with his horse continued his journey by unfrequented roads.

Toward nightfall his horse went lame and in searching for a place to buy another, he stumbled on a house filled with men, whom Watt at once identified as Border Ruffians—thieves and murderers who terrorized the country in the name of Law and Order.

Pretending not to notice their interest in his satchel filled with gold, Watt prepared for bed in an upper room. During the night he narrowly escaped death, and fled with a fresh horse leaving a dead man behind him. From then on the Southerner realized that "Crow" Agger and his gang would be on his trail.

Next day he took the steamer again and there met "Prairie" Palmer and Enoch Fair, a young Northerner, who, sadly bewildered by the hostile crowd, was being harried by a "Regulator."

With some difficulty Fair was rescued and a friendship sprang up between the Northerner and Southerner. Fair wanted to take up farm-land and with some reluctance Watt agreed to join him. The young Southerner evidently feared something but his new friend was unwilling to question him.

Prairie Palmer left them on good land and pushed on to the West. Already this part of Kansas was getting too crowded for him.

One day at the nearest store Fair was held up by some of Agger's men who insisted he was riding a stolen horse. The fiery old store-keeper, who did not want his trade ruined, put the men to rout, and Fair rode back to Watt who pointed out more trouble. In a rough square made of four timbers on the land they thought was theirs, was a notice:

"This is Bud Peoples' claim, he'll shoot anny man what comes in a mile of it."

SOON after, a man appeared who claimed the land. After some reluctance he admitted that his name was Pelks. Fair showed him the notice, and when he still showed fight drove him off with an ax. The man left swearing vengeance.

"I'm afraid Pelks will come back with a gang," said Fair.

Next day the comrades started out to visit their neighbors, who they found friendly, but apprehensive about a mysterious cabin farther on. Curious, the men decided to visit the place themselves. There they found an Indian woman who was very unfriendly. When they left Watt told his friend that he had discovered a hole in the rock against which the cabin was built, and masked by a false door. Both men suspected evil doings.

Soon after, they found a notice pinned to their own door warning them to leave in forty-eight hours, and signed "Cap. Hemp." Both men decided that Hemp and the man who lived in the mysterious cabin was the same person, and that he was connected with Pelks.

"We're in for a siege," said Watt. "Tonight we'll stand guard."

When the attack came the men were ready for it. The baffled howls of the mob outside told them that their bullets were taking effect. In the leader's voice Watt recognized Crow Agger, and knew the owner of the other cabin. They routed the attackers and, following their advantage soon after burned the mysterious cabin. Here they discovered a press for the making of counterfeit money, and destroyed it. Surprised by the gang, they fled, leaving Agger dead. Fair had been hurt in the blazing cabin and with difficulty Watt got him to the horses. The gang had been broken forever. Agger would no longer terrorize the country.

FAIR'S arm, which had been hurt, grew more painful and they decided to seek a doctor at Topeka. The town was crowded with settlers and one, Reuben Morse, urged the young men to join his wagon-train. But they decided not to. Soon after their return to the cabin, they were visited by Sheriff Jones who informed Fair that he was under arrest for having a copy of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in his possession!

"Rifle Rule," copyright, 1924, by Hugh Pendexter.

The charge was absurd and they suspected the Indian woman from the mysterious cabin as being responsible, but there was no help for it and they were forced to ride to Lecompton with the Sheriff.

Through Watt's influence Fair was admitted to bail and was freed. The men returned to their holding and at the store met the Indian woman who cursed them and predicted that in seven days Fair would be dead. Unwilling to believe such superstition yet uneasy, they returned to their cabin.

They decided to take turns guarding as they feared the woman might lead her Cherokee killers against them. Toward evening a horseman arrived with a message from a friend in Lecompton warning Fair that a man was in town looking for Watt. Fair was unwilling to tell the reason, but decided that they must move on.

Before they had gone far they discovered that they were being trailed by the Knife Thrower and four other Indians. During the desperate pursuit Watt's horse went lame and they took refuge in a roofless cabin. They managed to escape in the darkness although Watt was hurt. Taking refuge in another cabin Fair went for water. When Watt opened his eyes he looked up into the face of a strange man.

THE man at the door turned like a flash and snapped his hand, and the long handle of a knife quivered within a few inches of Watt's head. Watt rolled his eyes and stared at it dully; then ejaculated—

"Knife Thrower!"

"Caught you at last, young prairie-chicken," snapped the breed. And his dark hand darted to his belt and with a flip of the wrist a second blade streaked into the log, and vibrated on the other side of Watt's head.

"Make a yelp and the next one goes through your heart," softly warned the Knife Thrower, as he drew and held a third knife in readiness. "Where's that other feller?"

"Gone to Fort Riley to get help," replied Watt. "Where's Crow Agger's woman?"

The man hissed like a snake, and corrected:

"My woman. My woman as soon as her medicine works. She was a fool to go with that man. He couldn't take care of her. Got himself killed. Now she goes with a man who can take care of her. She will let you live if you make a straight talk. Where's that other feller?"

"I've told you once," and Watt's voice was raised. "He's gone to Riley to get help. I was hurt. Horse fell on me. He left me here while he went for help."

"That makes it hard for you," and the breed turned his head to glance from the door again. Watt drew up his legs, thinking to make a last effort and secure one of the rifles leaning against the wall on his left. Instantly the breed faced about and a knife glittered the length of the room and lodged in a log close to the prisoner's ribs.

"—— you!" gritted the killer. "Want to git yourself killed ahead of time, eh?"

"No. Who was shooting at you back in the timber when we got away?"

The Knife Thrower cursed, using the vocabulary of his white blood. He was not pretending to answer the query, but from his imprecations Watt deduced their rescurer at the roofless cabin was alone and kept on his horse some distance from the timber and used a rifle of long range, and had retreated with two of the gang following him afoot.

The ferocious outburst terminated abruptly. The breed cocked his head and listened, then suspiciously said:

"Your friend is hiding near here, I think. You call out for him to come."

"He rode to Fort Riley," repeated Watt.

"Then you won't do him any harm to ask him to come here."

And up went the dark hand holding the fourth knife.

"Be quick! Yell, —— you! Tell him to bring water."

And as the lithe form bent foward the arm went back—

"I count four; you live or die before I finish. One—two——"

"The killer's here! Keep away, Enoch!" shrieked Watt.

With a yell of rage the killer drew his hand back of his head. Watt threw himself far to one side, and heard the knife clatter against the wall, heard the sound of a heavy body crashing to the floor, and could not understand it. Lifting his head he beheld the killer on the floor. Then Fair's distorted face showed in the doorway.

"Oh, Lord! Too late!" groaned Fair, as he saw only a limp form at the end of the room and three knives sticking in the logs.

"Enoch! You heard me!" gasped Watt, trying to struggle to his feet.

With two leaps Fair had an arm around his waist and was lifting him to his feet.

"Hurry! Hurry! I'll carry you to your horse. You must ride."

"Let me walk. I'll manage it. He was throwing the knife. I ducked. What happened?" as he shook off the supporting arm and took a staggering step toward the door.

He halted on reaching the figure, lying face down. Then he saw the ax.

"Saw him through the door when I was fetching the water. I set the pail down. Then came your warning. He was just making to heave the knife when I threw the ax. ——! I thought I was too late. Horses in a shed back of that clump of ash. See if you can get them out. I'll bring the guns."

He secured the rifles, but would not touch the ax. As he quit the cabin he paused to glance over the open country to the south. A horse, carrying double, was breaking from the timber up the creek and galloping over the grass-lands. He fired a rifle and the horse wheeled and made for cover.

"That woman and one man on one horse!" he yelled to Watt. "They've gone back into the timber. Can you manage the nags?"

Watt answered him by rounding the corner of the cabin, riding his horse and leading Fair's. He seized his rifle and said:

"The Knife Thrower has a good horse near by. We ought to get him."

But Fair had only one desire—to be leaving the spot. And as they galloped along the edge of the timber and down the creek both wondered what the owner of the cabin would think when he returned home and found the dead man and the knives sticking in the logs. And they also wondered if the Cherokee woman would decide her medicine lacked power; or if she would pursue her quest for vengeance still further. That Watt was following a side-line of speculation was proved when they turned to ford the creek and he remarked—

"Wonder where'n —— that Missouri sheriff is about this time?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BULLY OF FORT RILEY

IN ONE of the eight houses of Riley City the fugitives found the owner of the ferry-boat and hired him to take them across to Kansas City—two houses. It was evening when they arrived at Fort Riley. Fair was pleased and Watt was delighted with the brave show of lights in the wide expanse of white limestone buildings and the music of an excellent band. The fort structures were even more imposing than those at Fort Leavenworth. The comrades left their horses in the Government corral; and although they must postpone a detailed inspection of the place until the morrow the nature of the building stone and the bright illumination permitted them to get a very favorable impression of this post, finished three years before and at a cost of half a million dollars, when the junction of the Kansas and Republican was well inside the Indian country.

Attracted by the music the comrades wandered toward a large building and discovered a ball was in progress. Through the windows they could see well-groomed civilians and smartly uniformed officers and their ladies. From the crudities of Mill and Clark Creeks they had been transported to a scene which amazed them because of its brilliancy. Only two years back and Fort Leavenworth marked the border between civilization and a red country. In less than this period of time the eastern border of the red man's lands had been pushed westward a hundred and ten miles.

Fair was filled with admiration for the work performed by his countrymen. Watt was more self-centered in his reflections; and as he stood close to the window and glanced down at his travel-stained clothes he ruefully regretted—

"Wish we could be in there."

"We'd look funny," laughed Fair. "Too gay for us."

"I believe we would feel quite at home," stiffly rejoined Watt. "Blood counts more than clothes."

"On Mill Creek and out on the plains, yes. But not where people gather to show their best clothes. Didn't know there were so many women out here. Must be some sort of a celebration."

A gray-haired sergeant, who had listened to them with amusement wrinkling his weathered face, turned and genially remarked:

"You two reckoned there was nothing but Injuns out here, huh? Governor Shannon is here tonight. Besides the officers' ladies all the women with their men-folks for miles around are here. You must have come in late or you'd have heard the fifteen-gun salute."

"We were on the prairie. We did hear a rumbling, booming sound, but thought it must be thunder," Watt evasively remarked.

"Here comes the governor now," continued the sergeant as a tall gray-haired man escorted a lady to a seat close by the open window. As he drew near the comrades observed that his features were coarse, yet relieved by a good forehead and mild eyes. Altogether, he was an excellent type of the man who loves sociability, and will be rash and quick to raise a storm and then irresolute as to how to undo the mischief.

A burly fellow approached the window and roughly elbowed Watt and Fair aside so he might have an unobstructed view of the ballroom. The sergeant glanced at the newcomer, then at the comrades, and, catching Watt's flare of indignation, slightly shook his head. Reluctance to indulge in a brawl almost in the presence of the ladies, rather than the sergeant's warning, impelled Watt to choke back his temper and remain content with glaring at the man's broad shoulders.

Having looked his fill the fellow wheeled about and roughly passed between the two friends, his shoulders brushing both aside.

"Impudent beggar!" growled Watt.

"You'll have better health and more legs and arms if he doesn't know you said that," warned the sergeant. "That's Bully Jacks, boss of the Government wagon-train just in from Laramie and Kearny. When he crowds up against you, just smile and don't get het up. After finishing six hundred miles return trip through savage country he wouldn't find either of you a mouthful."

"Thanks," muttered Watt, "but size and insolence don't mean anything to me when I'm being pushed around."

"Live and learn," serenely replied the sergeant as he switched his attention back to the ballroom.

The incident spoiled the spectacle for Watt. It only needed the bully's rough behavior to complete his resentment at being an outsider where dancing and music were to be enjoyed. Bully Jacks would never presume to insult a post guest; and heretofore Watt had always enjoyed that rôle. Understanding his friend's moods, Fair urged:

"Let's find sleeping-quarters and plan for the next move. This is just a jumping-off place for us. Tomorrow we must be riding somewhere."

The sergeant caught this speech and told them:

"Take your blankets to the barracks. Plenty of room."

They thanked him and drew back from the window, and Fair continued:

"Best plan to my mind is to strike south and make Council Grove and wait there for a wagon-train bound for New Mexico. Your friend, the sheriff, would never think of looking for us there."

"All right. We'll talk it over tomorrow. I wouldn't notice being shoved around if the clumsy lout hadn't seen where he was going. But that fellow put himself out to give us the shoulder. You noticed how he didn't crowd against the sergeant any."

"Oh, let's not think about that," Fair impatiently retorted. "We've just escaped from the Cherokee gang, and from a sheriff. What a camp bully does, so long as he doesn't lay hands on us, isn't of any account."

"I was raised to resent an insult."

"Of course you were. But let's get our minds to working as to just how we're to save our hides."

Still grumbling, Watt accompanied Fair to the barracks where, as the sergeant had said, they readily gained permission to spread their blankets. By the time they had brought up their blanket-rolls from the horse-corral the sergeant was at the barracks and found them bunks. They slept well and in the morning bought their breakfast of the sutler, although welcome to mess with the sergeant. Fair was for accepting the invitation, but Watt distressed him by refusing. Fair was disappointed in what he took to be a show of snobbishness in his friend, and when Watt intimated he would pay his respects to the commander and meet Governor Shannon, the New Englander fairly exploded, and rebuked:

"The soldiers aren't stylish enough for you. You want to play the aristocrat. Wonder you travel in my company."

"Oh, shut up with your preaching!" grunted Watt, his dark face reflecting his rising anger. "Simply because I find myself among the rabble isn't any reason why I should take them all to my bosom. My people have entertained much bigger men than governors many times."

"All right, Your Highness. And now

let's get down to business. Do we ride for Council Grove? Thought you were keen for the Santa Fé trip?"

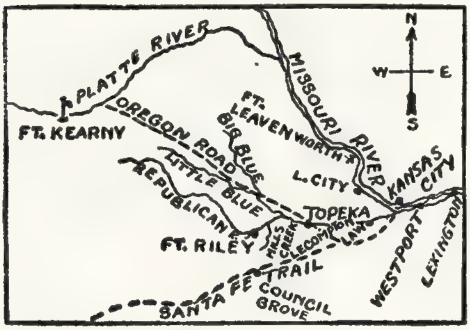
"Time enough to decide. No rush. Fellow in the barracks said there was to be a review of the troops by the governor, and another dance tonight."

"We're in no position to take part in their gay times even if we had been invited," reminded Fair. "And you're not satisfied to listen to the music and look on."

"My name, if I chose to identify myself, would be sufficient credentials for the two of us," Watt haughtily replied.

"I don't know as you'd call my family blue-blooded, but I'm the first of several generations to jump my bail," humorously returned Fair. But Watt was not to be beguiled into good temper.

Leaving the sutler's quarters they wandered about the fort. The location was less pleasing than that of Fort Leavenworth, but the buildings were more comfortable and spacious. On the opposite side of the Republican they saw several horsemen on the bluff and were much interested to discover they were Indians. The red men gazed at the fort some minutes then turned and disappeared.



"First wild ones I've seen," mused Fair.

Watt was still brooding over what he considered to be a false position. He believed he should have been invited to the officers' mess. Fair ignored his mood and insisted they should make inquiries about Prairie Palmer.

"Palmer's out among the redskins by this time, trading beads," said Watt. "We won't see him again. Santa Fé must be our road, I suppose."

"All right. Then let's ask questions and learn something. We ought to be leaving here."

Watt sighed dolefully and said:

"It's the last glimpse we'll have of civilized life. We'll find no welcome among the Spaniards of the better class. Tomorrow will be as good as today."

Fair gave it up and said no more. From a soldier they learned that the review would be held shortly before the noon hour, and that during the afternoon the governor would ride under escort up the Smoky Hill river-bottom, returning in time for supper and the second ball. They took their horses from the corral and picketed them out to graze. On returning to the fort they halted to look at a large wagon-train, the one just arrived from Fort Laramie and Fort Kearny. Smiths were busy mending or replacing iron work, while other artificers were repairing the tops and wheels.

Fair was much interested in what he observed, for it was work he could easily perform. These men, repairing the damage done by Indian attacks and the accidents of travel, were the same breed of pioneers as those who made the clearing and built the cabin. Manual labor did not appeal to Watt, however, and the train merely refreshed his recollection of the bully's rudeness. To make sure it was Jacks' outfit he inquired of a solider if the wagons were just in from Kearny, and if more than one train had arrived.

"Just that one. Lucky to make it without losing men. They report the reds are uneasy and planning some deviltry. Followed for miles by two bands. If the crew hadn't been so strong they'd had a fight. Wish I'd gone in for that 'stead of soldiering."

"Who's the boss?" politely asked Watt.

"Bully Jacks. And, stranger, he's a man who always fetches his outfit through. May need to be patched up a trifle when he pulls in, but he comes through every time."

As the soldier walked on Fair insisted:

"Hale, you come away. I know what you're thinking about, but it won't do. We don't want any fuss with any one. You can't afford to attract attention to either of us."

To Fair's great relief Watt smiled in his old manner and clapped him on the shoulder and said:

"Right, Old Sober Face. I'm several kinds of a fool. We'll remember we're two humble stock-raisers, who never got started. We'll get away early tomorrow morning."

"You're a mighty good fellow, Hale, even if you do have the ——est notions at times. Let's watch the soldiers drill, then pick up some information about the road between here and Council Grove."

WHILE he was speaking Fair saw a big man walking toward them. There was that in his approach, and appearance that indicated a set purpose. Behind him a short distance lounged a dozen or more men who were grinning in keen anticipation. Watt was standing with his back to the fellow and suspected no danger. Fair knew fresh trouble was upon them and that they could not avoid it. He darted an appraising glance over his friend's slim, lithe figure, and knew Watt was not the man for the grueling job ahead.

With knife or pistol he would fight his bigness, but in a rough-and-tumble affair he would quickly be at the bully's mercy. And let him be man-handled and he would kill unless his assailant left him dead on the ground. Fair had made up his mind by the time Jacks swung up behind Watt and was about to reach out a rough hand to start the trouble. The broad, battered face, scarred by the many battles his love of fighting had brought to him, lighted with ferocious joy as he lifted his hand to bring it down on Watt's shoulder. Pushing his friend aside Fair suddenly confronted the bully and accused—

"You're the man who wanted all the earth last night."

"A sojer said you reckoned you had a bone to pick with me along of my bumping you out my path," retorted Jacks.

"You acted the best you know how, I suppose, but you have lots of room for improving your manners," continued Fair. "What you need is to be taught a few things. You come here for a fight, I take it?"

"What the —— do you mean, Enoch? This is my affair!" indignantly cried Watt, now beginning to recover his wits.

Jacks ignored him, and grinning in savage amusement at Fair said:

"I wouldn't call it a fight. When you say 'fight' you mean a man's job. I don't see any man's job here."

And he slowly rolled up a shirt-sleeve.

Watt made an inarticulate sound as he gathered himself to spring upon the bully. Without any preliminaries Fair feinted with his left and smashed his right fist against Jacks' jaw, sending him staggering back and wiping the grin from the scarred face. The blow would have knocked an ordinary man senseless. Watt howled in rage and attempted to push Fair to one side, but the latter repulsed the attempt and several of the wagon-crew rushed up and dragged the young man back and yelled:

"Man to man! Fair play! Form a ring!"

Jacks stood staring at Fair while the ring was being formed with two men holding Watt. The bully no longer grinned, nor was his gaze especially malevolent. He appeared to be both pleased and surprized.

"That slap was very nifty," he told Fair. "You got quite a bit of push behind it, too. I wasn't looking for it, but that's part of the game. Younker, after I've licked you and after you've got over the licking you're going to make a mighty good man for my outfit."

Knowing he was in for it and could lose nothing by boasting Fair replied,

"There isn't room enough for the two of us in your outfit. We're wasting time talking. I'm keen to see the review."

Jacks was genuinely amused.

"You —— young sass-hound!" he cried approvingly. "You're going to make a mighty good man for me. You've got guts. Once you l'arn who's your master you'll make a name for yourself on the Laramie road. We won't waste any more time."

Watt now made himself heard, fiercely demanding:

"You —— cowards! Let me go! Can't you see this is my fight! Enoch Fair, don't you dare put this shame on me."

And for a minute or two he secured the attention of all by his efforts to shake off the men who were holding him. At last, panting and helpless and consumed with rage, he realized he could do nothing.

"Any rules in this fight?" asked Fair, coming up on his toes.

"No rules. Go as you please," chuckled Jacks.

Watt recovered his breath and in a last appeal hoarsely shouted:

"Wait, you big lout! You're my meat. I'm the one who made talk about you. Fair, you draw out——"

A hand was clapped over his mouth. Bully Jacks beamed upon him and exclaimed:

"Of all the —— luck! Two of 'em! Two good men! Fighting each other to see who'll have the first crack at me! Younker, don't you fret. There's more'n 'nough to go round. In a minute I'll put you on the ground beside this young rooster. Then when you both git well you can join my crew and have lots of fun. I never take a man on till I've licked him."

Watt bit at the hand over his mouth, swore and raved, but the teamsters laughed and held him in the circle. Much bantering ran around the circle as Fair pulled off his shirt. Some of the men in mock pity begged Jacks not to kill the stranger. Others pleaded with Fair to spare their boss. Jacks did not bother to remove any clothing.

"I'm ready," announced Fair, holding his hands loosely before him.

"You strip—good!" grunted Jacks, and he jumped forward to seize his adversary.

Instead of giving ground as the spectators and the bully had expected Fair ducked inside the outstretched hands and rocked Jacks' shaggy head with swings to both sides of the jaw, and then managed to get clear.

Jacks contracted his brows and rubbed his jaw and slowly remarked:

"That's fine. You'n me are going to have a heap of fun."

He rushed in like a mad buffalo-bull, and duck and twist as he would Fair could not evade the gripping hands. But the moment he knew he was caught he shifted to wrestling, and with clever footwork sent the bully staggering back to save himself from a fall. As Jacks relinquished his cruel grip and was striving to regain his balance a terrific smash to the chin sent him down on his shoulders and neck, his brawny legs high in the air. Watt was screaming like a madman. The spectators could remember no fight when Bully Jacks had taken the ground.

Jacks arched his back and started to spring to his feet, but dropped back under a drive to his throat. Whirling on his face and with his back to Fair he gained his feet, although Fair hurt his hands striking against the hard skull.

"By ——, younker! You're a good man! You're all right!" Jacks exulted; then he threw an arm across his jaw and rushed forward.

The crowd would not give ground and for a second time Fair found himself in a clinch.

"You're going to make a good man for me," mumbled Jacks as he dug his chin into Fair's shoulder.

Fair had no breath to waste in conversation. By this time he knew his opponent was a rough-and-tumble fighter who depended entirely on his weight and great strength. Shifting his footing and working his left arm lower around the barrel-like body Fair arched his back and suddenly drew down his head and butted his adversary under the chin, and as the shaggy head went backward and the arm across his back loosened its pressure he tore himself loose and swung his right, landing on the nose and flattening it.

This blow hurt tremendously; and with a snarl of pain Jacks became a terrible machine. Defend himself as best he could Fair was smothered with blows, and his shoulders and back were furrowed by the clawing hands. Only by his cleverness did he manage partially to escape the drives he could not parry, yet he had kept his feet. Now he knew the climax had come, and in desperation he turned half-around and ducked his head as if essaying flight. As Jacks leaped upon him to end the business he swayed to one side and drove back his elbow blindly. As luck would have it the point caught Jacks under the ear and sent him staggering backward, coughing and spitting. Then he was coming head on again, swinging his arms like flails, and beating down Fair's guard until the right forearm caught him across the head and knocked him unconscious.

"You murderer! You murderer!" screamed Watt.

But a pail of water soon brought Fair to his senses. His head was resting on a teamster's knee. Bully Jacks stood with anxious face looking down on him. Fair smiled faintly as he observed the various reminders of the fight on the broad countenance and murmured—

"I've put some marks on you, my man, you'll carry for some days."

"You young cuss!" slowly retorted Jacks. "Still got sand in your craw! I was just going to send for a surgeon to see how bad your skull was cracked. And here you be, bringing me a new war-pipe."

"My head aches, but I'm all right to start again," assured Fair, starting to stand.

Watt threw off the detaining hands and informed Jacks:

"As soon as you feel rested you and I will settle the quarrel my friend tried to cheat me out of. This is my fight, and he had no business to step in."

"Reg'lar litter of wildcats!" mused Jacks admiringly. "Young feller, hope you won't think I'm quitting, but our fuss must wait a bit. Now that I don't need a saw-bones for your fire-eating friend I'm going to hunt one up for myself. That crack over his head busted a bone in my arm."

"I desire that you are at your best when we meet," Watts told him with much hauteur.

Waving his left hand before him in a pantomime of one finding words entirely inadequate Jacks limped away to find the post surgeon. The wagon-crew, rough of dress, speech and garb, crowded about Fair and paid him tribute. The best they could expect of a man was a readiness to take punishment from Bully Jacks. That the boss could ever be whipped had never entered their calculations. That this stranger with the blue eyes and quiet voice could come so near to winning a victory was most astounding.

"Doggone, young fellers! Come down and eat with us from now on," insisted the man who had supported Fair's head. "Bully will be looking for both of you. Never see him cotton to folks way he has to you two. He likes upstanding men. The way you lambasted him at the start did his heart good. That's why he didn't gouge you, or take a bite out your ear. Why, he'd love you like a brother if you'd fetched him one more crack."

"Gospel truth!" added another as Fair stared incredulously at the first speaker. "He thought well of you from the start! But when you give him the elbow I knew he was taking a mighty strong liking to you."

"Go ahead and have your fun," encouraged Fair. "There's no more fight in me this day."

"Fun?" yelped the man. "Don't you s'pose we know a he-critter when we see him in action? The whole crew is proud of the fight you made. You two live at the wagons s'long as you're anywhere near 'em. Now let's watch the sojers drill and then go eat."

So it happened that the comrades witnessed the review in company with the wagon-train crew. And somehow they felt they were in as goodly company as if they had been standing with the governor and the officers. If Watt felt a twinge of envy when he saw some young lieutenant waiting on the ladies it was forgotten once he turned his gaze on Fair's swollen face. As they walked with their new friends, now profanely affectionate, back to the wagons, Watt remarked to Fair:

"If ever I get a chance I'll pay you, Old Deacon Head. But why'n —— didn't you tell me you could make a real fight?"

"Don't talk about it any more. You'll get the men started again. It's only what's always happening up in the woods, where I learned to swing an ax. But up there, if it's for blood, it's all in the game to stamp in a man's face and leave the pattern of your hob-nailed shoes."

"Deliver me!" gasped Watt.

A man called "Slim" took charge of the guests, and when dinner was served they found they were in Bully Jacks' mess. The boss was dour of visage when he returned to the wagons, but smiled a welcome on beholding the comrades.

"Knew the boys would fetch you along," he told them. "That —— surgeon wants me to wear a splint, but I sha'n't keep it on long. And if any skunk in this outfit figgers it's a good time to act sassy I'll show him he's mistook."

The men grinned at the threat, and Jacks forgot his arm as he reviewed the fight and went into the details with great gusto. When they had eaten and were settled for a smoke Watt asked about the route to Council Grove, and was told it would be necessary for them to retrace their steps to the head of the Neosha and follow down.

"It's only a thirty-five-mile ride," Jacks added. "But if you hanker to hit a Santa Fé train you should 'a' stopped in Westport, or Kansas City, or Leavenworth. That way you could l'arn something about a outfit before joining it."

"We came away from the river in something of a hurry," explained Watt.

Jacks glared at them fondly.

"Two best men I've took on for a long time," he declared. "I'll probably have to push through to Leavenworth before making a return trip to Kearny and Laramie. But the travel east will be just enough for you to l'arn the ropes."

"We can't go east," Watt quietly replied.

"Huh? I see. By ——! I'd hate most mortal to lose you two."

"Ever hear of Prairie Palmer?" Fair asked.

"Should say so. Good friend of mine.

He took some trade up the Pawnee—Republican fork—I felt skittish about his going. Injuns getting too brash. So many sojers have been drawn in to keep things quiet in the east end of the territory the reds now think the whites are skeered of 'em. But I won't give up hope about you two going with me. Needn't go east. Stick here and tend stock till we pull back from Leavenworth."

THAT afternoon in company with several members of the wagon-train crew Watt and Fair paddled across the Republican, swimming their horses, and rode several miles up the Smoky Hill fork. They saw much large cottonwood, mixed with elms, and small oaks filling the hillside ravines. They also glimpsed some horsemen on the top of the slope extending to Sycamore Creek, and it was one of the wagon outfit who gave the word for the return.

"Those red fellers was on the bluff this morning watching the fort. Don't seem reasonable any of them would come this far to make mischief, but I figger they're spies. Perhaps on the lookout for a train to start up Kearny way."

It was late afternoon when they reached the fort. They shifted their blankets from the barracks to the train, as they had taken a strong liking to the crew. Watt was surprized to find there was much in Jacks he could approve, although he felt somewhat embarrassed in the man's presence. After supper, when he had a chance to speak with Jacks aside, he explained:

"I don't like to pull out before you and I have settled our trouble. On the other hand I can't wait for your arm to mend. I want you to know that I have the engagement in mind, and that I'll be very much at your service if you're here when we come back from Santa Fé. Fair had no business to act as he did. It was my fight. I wanted you to understand that."

"Cuss my boots if you don't make it harder'n harder!" roared Jacks. "Here you be, coming to me with a war-pipe in both fists. Look here, younker, if you two'll join on I'll eat crow before all the boys and 'low I'm only a low, meeching hound and scared of both of you."

"No, thanks," dryly retorted Watt. "If we ever travel with your train you and I will have our argument first. I'll take the one licking to be even with my partner. And only one. Any one try to manhandle me after that and I'll throw lead. I'm bigger'n Smoky Hill butte when it comes to working a hand-gun."

"Any way you want it, only just go along with us." And the bully's voice was almost pleading.

"We can't. That's final. There's a man from Missouri looking for me."

"Then he must be an officer of the law, or you wouldn't be running. We won't let him lay a hand on you."

"And my friend is jumping his bail. He was held for something he never did."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing much, except we were chased off our claims on Mill Creek by the Knife Thrower, Cherokee breed. We had a running fight with him and his four men to get this far."

"—— that scum!" thundered Jacks, brandishing a fist. "I swore I'd git him if he ever come back to the territory. Now he's up here I'll quit the train on the way to Fort Leavenworth long enough to keep my word."

"You can't get him. Fair killed him with an ax just as he was going to knife me. All happened in an empty cabin on Clark's Creek near the crossing."

Jacks stared at him in amazement, and it was nearly a minute before he could speak. Then came a blurred volley of fond expletives. When he attained coherency he bawled for the men to gather around him. As they responded he announced the news after a profane apostrophe to his boots and liver. There was scarcely a man in the train who was not thoroughly conversant with the Thrower's vicious history. Fair was angry with Watt for telling it and, although hotly urged, stoutly refused to give any details. Watt, however, was ready to satisfy their hungry ears, and graphically described his hurt and the subsequent tragedy in the cabin. When he had finished Jacks could only mutter:

"He done it with an ax! A long chopping-ax. He chopped the Thrower down like he was a tree! Don't that beat ——!"

"If you'd know'd that, Bully, you'd never fought him, would you?" cried Slim.

"I'd first got him to promise he'd be gentle. With a long chopping-ax! Ugh!"

Several new guests arrived for the ball that night. And also there came a man who had no interest in the festivities and desired only to have a private conversation with the commander. He was still with the commander when Bully Jacks went to headquarters to get orders. Jacks was waiting in an ante room when the stranger and the commander emerged from the office, and he heard the commander say:

"If he's here, Sheriff, we'll locate him in the morning. Men come and go, and bunk and eat all over the place. Personally I've seen no young fellow such as you describe."

"Then I'm afraid he ain't come in yet," said the Missouri sheriff. "Feller like Watt would make for headquarters the first thing and be taken into the officers' mess. He comes from a mighty fine old Mississippi fambly."

"You make me almost wish you don't find him," was the sober reply. "As I understand it, it was a fair fight and he happened to have the luck— However, I'll give you a squad in the morning and you can look the fort over—Jacks, the quartermaster has your orders."

The train-boss ducked his head and was retiring, his mind in a whirl, when the commander detained him, saying:

"Just a minute, Jacks. This is Sheriff Doble, from Missouri. Keen to find a man by the name of Watt."

"Hale Watt. Reg'lar dandy. Fine old Mississippi fambly. Dark complected, slim built, about twenty-two years old, long black hair, store clothes, fond of cards and whisky," eagerly supplemented the sheriff.

"Have you seen any such man within a day or so around the fort?" asked the commander.

Jacks pursed his swollen lips and seemed to be refreshing his recollection, then shook his shaggy head and answered:

"Nary a man by that name or description, sir. He couldn't 'a' stopped here. Prob'ly slid south to the Santa Fé road. Or turned on north for Californy or Oregon."

And with another duck of the head he walked away, taking a course that led him from the wagon-train for fear the sheriff would wish to accompany him. Once satisfied the sheriff preferred the lights and music he started on a lumbering run for the wagons.

Watt and Fair were about to go with the men to watch the dancing when Jacks appeared and violently barred their path. Without a word he seized Watt by the collar and lifted him up and tossed him into the end of a long, covered freight-wagon.

"Foller him, quick!" he snapped to Fair. Watt's head appeared at the opening as Fair started to obey. Jacks' open palm pushed Watt back and shoved Fair inside the wagon. Then he thrust his head under the cover and hissed:

"Missoury sheriff here looking for Hale Watt. I just told the commander there weren't no such animal here. Now, —— you, keep quiet!"

His men heard him but none needed to be told to keep his mouth closed. Guards were thrown out to give warning if a searching-party was abroad. But the sheriff had no intention of looking for his man that night; and as the minutes passed and there was no alarm the comrades were allowed to leave the wagon and take counsel with their new friend.

After they had discussed the situation from all angles Jacks told them:

"This is the best move for you two to make. Early in the morning, a couple of hours before sunrise, you ride up the right bank of the Pawnee. One of the boys will fetch your hosses here tonight and put you up some rations."

"But there was strange Injuns on the bluff across the river and up the Smoky Hill Valley this afternoon," reminded Slim.

"Just a few scouts at the most," said Jacks. "All they wanted was to see if any new train was in from the East. By this time they've gone back to report no trains in sight. And they'll keep to their side of the river. You boys won't need to go more'n fifteen or twenty miles. Make your camp and take it easy. Just as soon as the sheriff skedaddles back east I'll send one of the boys after you and you can come back. Commander ain't seen either of you and he's no need to if you keep among the wagons. Wear new names and you'll be ready to 'catch-up' for wherever you want to go. The road'll be clear to Council Grove and Santa Fé. But I'll hate like —— to lose you."

They were smoking their pipes and talking over this plan when one of the men came in, bursting with the importance of his news

"Sheriff's taking a few drinks with the officers. Heard him say that these two fellers cleaned out the Crow Agger gang, killed him and all his men!"

This startling announcement left the

group speechless for nearly a minute. Then Jacks faintly asked—

"Is there anything else in your lives that you two young ——s is keeping back?"

"The sheriff exaggerates," protested Fair. "Only Agger and three of his men and his pack of dogs are dead."

CHAPTER IX

UP THE REPUBLICAN

IT LACKED two hours to sunrise when Watt and Fair were awakened by one of the wagon-train guard. The sky was heavily overcast and lacking the eastern lights that forerun the cloudless day. The wind was from the north, and raw and chill. Breakfast was ready for the comrades, and their horses were saddled and hitched to a wagon-wheel. Hot coffee and a substantial meal considerably lessened their depression; yet there remained a strong disinclination to leave the fire and their new friends and start off alone into the gloomy northland. Before they had finished eating Bully Jacks rolled out of his blankets and, blinking sleepily, came and sat by the fire.

Between yawns he told them:

"I put in a small tent. Just big enough to keep off the rain. All right for guns and fixings?"

"We have plenty of both," Watt assured him as he stared moodily at the bluff across the Republican.

"If I could have an ax," said Fair. "Somehow I feel more at home with an ax than with a gun."

Jacks shuddered and muttered:

"Bloodthirsty cuss! Chopped him down like he was a tree! Ugh! But that must a been sorter mussy work. Wonder you didn't tear my arm off with your teeth! Hi, Slim! Dig out an ax. Our young slaughtering friend don't feel to home without one."

He waxed very profane and abusive when Fair attempted to pay for the ax, and finally explained:

"It don't belong to me. Belongs to the Government. Think I'm low down enough to sell Government property?"

"It wouldn't be so ghastly and dreary if the sun was shining," sighed Watt as he finished his coffee, reluctantly arose and walked to his horse.

"Yesterday melting; today freezing. Way it is out here," growled Jacks. "Maybe we can think up a good place for you to hide in close by to the fort."

"No; we mustn't run any risks," said Fair.

Slim came up with an ax and with a broad grin presented it to Fair, who swung it about his head and nodded approvingly. It "hung" right and was well-balanced. He thrust it into his saddle-roll and swung into the saddle just as a barefooted teamster came running among the wagons. He halted before Jacks and hoarsely warned:

"Tell 'em to git! They're turning out a squad to make a quiet search while the men are sleeping. Sheriff's up and primed with three drinks and will be down here mighty soon."

Fair rode ahead in leaving the wagon-train. Jacks walked by his side until they reached the beginning of the cottonwood along the river-bank.

"Now I've got to hustle back so they won't be wondering where I've been," he told the fugitives. "Keep in the shelter of the timber for a ways. Morning's too dark for them to see far. I'll circle round and enter from t'other side. Slim and another feller have my orders to ride down the road to the east for a few miles, while two more go down to the mouth of the river and swim their hosses across. Mebbe the sheriff will put after one of them couples. Good luck. And remember you'll make mighty good men for me, you —— pestiferous fire-eaters."

He was genuinely sorry to lose them although he endeavored to mask his feelings with a farewell explosion of oaths. And they were sorry to leave him; for rough and brutal as he was he would be a mountain of strength to those he liked in any trouble or danger; nor would he count any sacrifice too great if made in behalf of the man he called friend. With a bone-crushing grip of the hand he hurried back to block further the sheriff's search, and the comrades turned into an old trade-path, used by the Indians long before the first white men came to the new world.

The river-bottom was cut by numerous creeks and each stream had its fringe of timber, usually consisting of elm, ash and walnut instead of cottonwood. On the travelers' right the land sloped upward to form the divide between the Republican and the Big Blue and was covered with short buffalo-grass with occasional evidences of its limestone foundation.

Fearing every minute to hear the voice of the law calling on them to halt the comrades kept within the timber. It was not until they had covered half a dozen miles without any signs of pursuit that they dared to hope the sheriff was completely deceived. Then they ventured to ride up the eastern slope. With their range of vision much enlarged they found they had the gray and gloomy landscape to themselves. The wind now was threatening rain.

"Beastly uncomfortable!" growled Watt. "Let's get back to the bottom where there's more shelter."

They dropped down the slope to the old trail, which would lead one to the Black Hills, where in ancient days the Iroquois came from the land of the Long House; or it would lead to Santa Fé. Many a raiding, or trading-party of red men had passed back and forth over this road. Toward noon the sun painted the zenith yellow, but could not entirely conquer the low-hanging clouds. Watt scowled at the heavens and declared it was like riding under a cold and dirty tent. Fair suggested they halt and eat. They did so, and built a fire as it would be difficult for any but an Indian's eyes to detect smoke against the dark skyline. Jacks had packed for them a generous quantity of cooked meat, bacon and bread; and they used the fire only for making their coffee.

"Horrible country!" groaned Watts as he puffed his pipe.

"Land looks fertile. Believe it'll make good farming country some day."

"Need settlers to have farms. Any man who'd settle out here would be crazy, and crazy folks don't go in for planting."

"Good grazing country, too," added Fair.

"Dismal and desolate. Man isolated out here only needs to be scalped to complete his misery. Wish now we'd struck for the Santa Fé trail. A day's ride would have fetched us to Council Grove where we'd be sure of seeing folks of our own color."

"And probably the sheriff. We're up here only for a day or so," reminded Fair. "Once the sun comes out we'll feel different."

But the sun did not appear. In the middle of the afternoon a drop of rain fell upon Fair's upturned face and caused him to glance about for a camping-place. They hurried their horses along until they came to a spot near the river and a thick grove of cottonwoods. The canvas was soon stretched over poles between four large trees and the horses tethered where they could feed off the bark of young trees. Dry fuel was to be had by dragging it from the river bank, where the last high water had abandoned it.

With their supplies under shelter and a hot fire burning against a huge log they were comfortable enough if not for their fear of being pursued. To occupy his thoughts Fair further increased their security against the storm by filling in the north side of their shelter with crude basket-work of small branches. It rained sullenly and persistently and was more annoying than the transient fury and noise of a thunder-storm would have been. As the water sifted down through the foliage the horses ceased feeding and stood with drooping heads.

Watt watched the darkness thicken in the growth and remarked—

"Only consolation about this is that the rain is falling on the sheriff if he's fool enough to be out in it."

It grew dark early and they improved what was left of daylight by collecting more fuel. As they had no intention of resisting the officer, did he overtake them, and as they had seen no signs of Indians, they kept no watch that night. It was raining heavily when they dropped off to sleep, and it was still raining early in the morning when Fair crawled from his blankets and piled wood on the dying coals. When they next opened their eyes they found a miracle had been worked; the grove was flooded with sunlight and the air was soft and balmy as any New England June day.

The effect on their spirits was immediate and pronounced. Fair began to whistle. As they carried their supplies and blankets into the open Watt hummed a fragment of an old song and paused to admire the beauty of a morning that came to them fresh from an all-night bath. The horses were different animals, and did much kicking and cavorting about when led to graze on the rich grass outside the timber. Breakfast was soon disposed of and they resumed their journey. Jacks had said that fifteen or twenty miles would be far enough for them to withdraw from the fort; but they felt they were too close to Riley. Then again the sunshine had routed their despondency and it was quite impossible to waste the glorious morning in watching the river roll by.

As they swung up along the brow of the divide they discovered the river was rising and that there had been much rain up-country, as shown by the numerous patches of drift retrieved from the banks by high water. Also, the numerous creeks they were forced to cross were bank full, and twice they were obliged to ascend high up the divide before they could find a ford. For a day or so it would be hazardous work crossing from Fort Riley to the west side of the Republican.

Once the eye quit the rolling river it rested only on a genial Summer land. No somber clouds sagged from horizon to horizon, and the far distances were mysteries of blue and purple. The grass-lands, revivified by the rain, were carpets of restful green. The very white limestone formations were scoured to suit the most exacting housewife. Such freshness and cleanliness must appeal to the soul of man, or else there would be no point in the infinite attention to details of the vast cycle of natural phenomena. The response in the comrades was immediate, and for a time they forgot all their troubles and apprehensions in finding the world was good.

TOWARD midday they saw what they believed to be a band of Indians across the river, but quickly discovered the distant objects were buffalo, possibly a dozen in all. Instantly Watt was afire for crossing the river and procuring fresh meat. Fair pointed to the river and its burden of cottonwood-trees, freshly washed from the banks, and the viperous roots of half-submerged stumps and snags, and warmly objected to the adventure. Watt grumbled, but admitted the folly of his proposal and contented himself with knocking over some prairie chickens. So far as they could discern they were the only men in the world that day, and they felt much like boys who play Robinson Crusoe. By night they reluctantly ceased their dreaming and considered facts. They knew they must have covered fifty miles in the two days of travel, and their horses were in need of a rest. They agreed it would be unwise to travel farther.

By night the river had ceased to rise, but they did not know it as they withdrew to a growth of ash and walnut on a nameless creek and made their camp. Wolves gathered and made the night dolorous. As they were turning in for the night Watt confessed:

"I begin to understand how Palmer likes this sort of thing when it doesn't rain. It would be easy for a man just to keep on going, always searching for the edge of Nowhere and never quite finding it."

"I feel like a boy who's run away from school. I like it a heap, but know I ought to be back attending to the chores," said Fair.

They slept late in the morning and took their time in cooking their breakfast. Fair suggested they remain in camp one day and then slowly return to Fort Riley. Watt sniffed the clean air and urged:

"Why not push on to Fort Kearny. We've come this far. We might as well keep on going. From Kearny to Fort Laramie, from there to California where we can pick up a fortune in gold."

"More people fail to find gold in California than do find it. Jacks was to send a man after us. It wouldn't be right to keep traveling and leading him farther from the fort."

"We have three choices, Mr. Bail Jumper: New Mexico, California or Oregon. What say to going back till we meet the messenger and can send word by him to Jacks that we're pushing on?"

Fair weighed this proposition carefully. He believed his future was in some steady, routine occupation like stock-raising or farming. The hectic phases of prospecting tempted him but little. Thoughts of an adventurous life often filled his head, but he always endeavored to oust them as thoroughly delightful yet dangerous companions. There had been many reckless wanderers in the men of his race, and his heritage was a mixture of strong desire and a stern sense of duty, the irresponsibility of the foot-free and the severely practical. Now, for the first time, he felt free to cater to the wild strain in his blood, for Kansas was closed to him. He finally agreed:

"After we've met Jacks' man and turned him back I'll go to Kearny and the Coast."

Watt was immensely pleased and was very boyish in showing his delight. He was all for starting immediately over their back-track and concluding their business with Jacks' messenger. But Fair insisted they should remain in their camp for the day as originally planned so that the horses might have time to rest. In the middle of the forenoon they left their animals and taking their rifles walked half a mile down the creek to where it emptied into the river. Some driftwood was floating by but it was obvious the water was sinking. There was a break in the timber on the west bank opposite the mouth of the creek, and staring through this at the open country beyond Watt longingly exclaimed:

"There's some more buffalo. Queer how much they can look like men on horseback. I believe we could swim our horses across and shoot one."

"We haven't our horses here. If we tire them out chasing buffalo we'll have to camp on the creek another day."

Watt watched the distant dots for some moments and then excitedly cried:

"We won't need to use the horses! The buffaloes are coming here to drink. Can't you see they're making for the river? See how the leader keeps well-ahead."

The bobbing dots were moving toward the river. The comrades watched them hopefully and were astounded to see a puff of smoke rise from the dot in the lead and in a few seconds to hear the faint report of a firearm.

"Why, they ain't buffalo!" cried Watt.

"Not less buffaloes shoot guns," agreed Fair. "Would one Indian be out where white men could chase him? I don't believe it."

"Injuns chasing one white man! Look! He shoots again! Using a rifle!"

"He hasn't done them any damage yet that I can see."

"The Indians are spreading out!" babbled Watt. "Now they're shooting!"

And several tiny plumes of smoke rose above the pursuers. As they did not shoot again Watt decided they were armed with old flintlock smooth-bores.

Fair advanced to the edge of the bank and waved his hat in hope the fugitive would see and then take heart. Whether he did, or did not, he held his course on a long diagonal instead of turning to strike the river at a point some distance below the mouth of the creek.

"I don't believe he's seen me yet," said Fair. "But he's making for this opening as he plans to cross the river and doesn't want to be held up by the timber.

But the situation remained as unreal as a dream. He knew the red men would soon be upon them unless they turned and retreated, but he had no thought of flight; nor could he imagine himself giving and receiving wounds.

"I make the first bunch of Injuns to be six," said Watt. "There are more than that some distance back."

The Indians in the lead were now flogging their ponies in an effort to close in so as to be on hand to pick off the fugitive while he was in the water. The latter, a white man and wearing the clothes of the settlement, galloped up to the bank and leaped to the ground. He waved a hand to Watt and Fair, and without any hesitation sent his horse into the stream, and plunged in himself and clung to the tail with one hand and held his rifle out of the water with the other.

Now the Indians began whooping and urging their mounts to greater efforts. Watt raised his rifle and fired at the man in the lead. The shot did no damage, but the effect on the savages greatly surprized him. With the crack of the Sharp's the six riders disappeared from view. Clinging low to the sides of their ponies they swerved from a headlong charge to ride parallel to the river, and with only a tip of a moccasin showing they discharged their trade-guns and arrows from under their ponies' necks. Fair nervously fired at a pony and missed.

The man in the water was in midstream and his tired horse was having a difficult time of it. As he entered the full force of the current he began drifting down-stream. Fair cupped his hands and shouted for the man to let go his hold on the animal's tail and to seize a piece of driftwood. He shouted this several times before the man understood. A cottonwood log floated sluggishly by, and quitting the horse the man threw his arm over this and kicked furiously. The log began moving inshore, but soon encountered the volume of water pouring from the mouth of the creek and was swept back.

Yelling exultingly the Indians continued their racing back and forth, but always concealed. The second band, fully a dozen, believed the chase was ended and cruelly beat their mounts so they might be in at the death. Fair reloaded and tried at a pony having a red hand painted on his flank, and was chagrined to miss. Watt pulled off his boots and coat and plunged into the river and swam like a fish to the log. Under the impetus of his fresh strength and skill the log was soon moving toward the eastern bank again. The horse, relieved of the dragging weight of the man, redoubled his efforts and scrambled ashore a short distance below Fair.

The Indians perceiving that only one man was holding the bank suddenly changed their tactics. Abandoning their mounts they advanced, dodging and leaping in a most grotesque and disconcerting manner. One of them was flourishing a round shield of thick bull's hide, and Fair perforated this and sent the man hunting cover behind some high-water débris. Without waiting to reload their smooth-bores the Indians began sending arrows into the river, and several of these with a hiss struck close to the swimmers. Several of the larger band now arrived and emptied their guns, the heavy balls sending up miniature fountains, but proving to be less accurate than the arrows.

Fair now had his nerves under control and was shooting accurately, only he had no target to shoot at. The horses had been hurried to cover and the Indians were protected by driftwood.

"Can't you swim?" yelled Watt as the water from a bullet splashed over his head.

"Pretty good," grunted the man. "Don't want to get my gun wet."

"Let go the log and strike out for it!" ordered Watt, and grabbing the rifle from the other's hand he swam easily on his side and was soon crawling up the bank. He turned and emptied the rifle at a savage. Fair fired at a man holding a long calumet in his hand and smashed the pipe instead of hitting the man. Had he dropped the warrior the attack would have been pressed with even more desperation. But the destruction of the pipe, could he have but known it, was a most grievous blow, and with howls of rage the Indians withdrew out of range.

They were Cheyennes and were carrying the pipe to the Oglala Dakotas, so that the two tribes might smoke war-tobacco and arrive at an amicable agreement to unite in another attempt to drive the whites from the Platte Valley. The pursuit of the lone white man had been a diversion that should not have been indulged in by the pipe-bearer. Therefore the accidental destruction of the calumet was a severe blow although the white men remained ignorant of the fact.

Watt caught the stranger's horse and led him away from the bank. Not until they were some distance up the creek did they take time to become acquainted. The stranger was of the border-town type, with nothing of the prairie or plains in either dress or manner. He wore boots and black coat and a blue woolen shirt. His face was long and thin and appeared to be the more so because of the goatee that prolonged the jaw-line. He was chewing tobacco when he emerged from the water and now as he took time to exchange glances with his new acquaintances he fished a sodden plug from his pocket and with a huge clasp-knife cut off a fresh cud.

"My friend is Enoch Fair and I am Hale Watt," Watt explained. "We have a claim back on Mill Creek."

The man smiled in a peculiar manner and in turn informed them:

"I'm Peter Doble, from Lexington. I'm powerful glad to meet you, Mr. Watt. Your friend, too."

"You're Sheriff Doble?" demanded Fair.

"I be. Much obliged for you snaking me out of that bit of trouble."

"We'd been better off to have left you to hoe your own row," said Fair in great disgust.

"On the contrary we were responsible for his running into danger," said Watt, his face wobegone. "He was trying to overtake us, Enoch."

"That's right," said the sheriff with a chuckle. "Chased two fellers across the Republican near the fort. Follered 'em up t'other bank for a few miles and lost 'em. But kept on going. Skunks must have hid out on me. First thing I knew I was jumped by the Injuns early this morning a few miles south of here. Lucky for my hide I was just breaking camp, about to give it up and ride back to Fort Riley. All I had to do was to hop into the saddle and ride for it. Ain't it queer the way Providence works? Used the Injuns to drive me into your arms!"

Fair was thinking how ironical it was that the decoy Jacks had planned as a safeguard should lead the sheriff to them.

"Now you're in our arms what are you going to do about it?" he demanded.

"I'm just going to nestle there till I get out of this——red country," was the prompt reply.

"Then you're in for a long visit to the far West," Fair grimly warned him.

"Suppose we make the camp, pack up

and get clear of this neighborhood. We can talk it over later," Watt wearily suggested. "Situation seems sort of mixed up. We must decide whether I am the sheriff's prisoner, or if he is mine."

"Lawd! You ain't my prisoner," cried the sheriff. "And don't say I'm yours. That gang back there is too big to quit chasing us. We ain't out the woods yet. They'll be after us a-hooting mighty peart."

"We'll race them to Kearny," decided Fair.

The sheriff's eyes glinted with satisfaction and he made the two uneasy by readily agreeing:

"Much more sensible than trying to get back to Riley. But we oughter be starting."

And he cast a worried glance toward the river.

They had but little to say as they finished the distance to the camp. Fair saddled the horses to give Watt an opportunity to talk privately with the sheriff. After he had made up the packs and brought up the horses Watt told him:

"Sheriff Doble feels he's under obligations to us, and yet he can't let all his travel go for nothing. He refuses to place me under arrest——"

"Most sartain he does," the sheriff emphatically exclaimed,

"—so long as we're in the Injun country."

"You was the one to speak the word 'arrest.' I ain't said it," reminded the sheriff.

"He's very anxious to get to some army post," Watt completed.

"Kearny's the best place on the map so long as we can't turn back to Riley," said the sheriff.

"Maybe it is for you and your plans," Fair coldly conceded; "but we have notions of our own. Unless chased there by Indians we won't enter Fort Kearny with you. Nor Fort Riley."

Doble's face grew glum and he tugged at his goatee as he slowly replied:

"I ain't in any position to make a loud talk. S'pose we drop the whole matter till we get clear of the reds. Ain't that a smoke out there?"

He was pointing to a thin column of smoke rising beyond the Republican.

"Two smokes!" cried Fair, shading his eyes. "The other is very faint. Must be miles away."

"Fellers who was chasing me are signaling to some friends to come on and help catch us," muttered the sheriff.

And he nervously tightened his belt a notch and chewed his cud more rapidly.

"We'll be going and dry out as we ride," said Watt.

The sheriff insisted on pausing long enough to draw the loads from his handgun and reload it. They rode at a brisk canter along the brow of the divide and had not gone far when they discovered several horsemen beyond the river holding a parallel course. These scouts were trailing the fugitives. The rest of the band would follow after medicine had been made to avert the evil that naturally would attend the destruction of the war-pipe.

"We should turn east and try to make the Oregon road on the Big Blue," said Fair. "That would give us good traveling to within sight of Kearny."

"Hoss sense!" heartily cried the sheriff. "It's a mighty good road, too, I've heard tell."

They changed their course and rode over the high prairie with its well-wooded creeks and quickly passed from view of the scouts beyond the river. As soon as they had placed a low ridge between them and the Republican their uneasiness was doubled. Being out of sight of the enemy, with their range of vision limited to the crest of the ridge, they forgot distance and time and began to imagine the enemy was close upon them, always on the point of topping the ridge. Fair pulled his ax from the blanket-roll; Watt repeatedly glanced back to the foreshortened skyline, and the sheriff masticated his cud with greater rapidity and frequently replaced it. Finally Doble sounded a note of warning, saying:

"I don't know much about Injuns, but I've had considerable to do with racing horses. It we want to lose this race we're going at it exactly right. We should slow down and have our nags fresh when the rub comes."

This was excellent advice and the comrades accepted it, although it was nerve-trying to check their speed while every moment expecting to hear the wild whoops of the savages and to behold them breaking the skyline. It was now evident that the sheriff's mount would be far from fresh even though greatly favored. The long, hard run to the river, and the energy expended in swimming the swollen stream, had greatly wearied the animal. It was only by an effort he managed to keep up with the other two horses even when they moved at a leisurely canter. The sheriff's thin face revealed his fears. He remarked nothing about the condition of his horse, but Watt read his thoughts and assured him:

"We'll stick by you. We'll forget you're a sheriff and just play you're a white man."

"If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be out in this —— hole," he reminded them.

"Twist that around," growled Fair. "If it wasn't for you we wouldn't be out here."

"Reckon that's so," slowly admitted Doble. "Ain't human natur' a funny thing? Goes round in a circle, always fetching back to where it started from. So it's six of one and half a dozen of another. If you won't quit me, I won't quit you. That's fair and han'some. I reckon you're the two fellers the Cheokee breeds had holed up back on Clark Creek where I swopped shots with them."

By noon they had covered a dozen or fifteen miles, or nearly half the distance between the Republican and the Big Blue, and the sheriff's horse was badly blown. They halted on a creek and picketed the animals to graze. Watt and the sheriff prepared food over a smokeless fire of dry fuel and watched for the enemy to appear. Fair, impelled by his New England caution, used his ax and felled a string of elms so as to form a crude breastwork. After they had eaten. they anxiously examined the sheriff's horse. The poor animal stood with head hanging low and seemed to be in a very bad condition.

"Won't make five miles without kerflumoxing," groaned Doble.

"Why'n the —— couldn't you have stayed in Missouri where you belonged?" Watt wrathfully exploded. "You've crowded us out here, and not being satisfied with that you've tagged along for us to take care of after fetching the Injuns down on us."

"True word as ever spoke," sorrowfully agreed Doble. "And it's mighty queer how things turn out. Electric telegraph begins talking and I find myself out in this cussed country. More new thingumbobs they git up the worse it'll be for all of us, I reckon. But I've got gumption enough to know when I'm licked. You two just heave some short logs on top of the long ones and leave me some grub. I'll take the old hoss inside and give 'em a fight."

"Pile up more logs," snapped Watt. "I'm going to scout back a bit."

And he leaped on his horse and pulled the picket pin and galloped for the crest of the grassy ridge.

Fair and Doble heaped brush and branches over the fallen trees and then Fair took his ax and proceeded to extend the defense so both ends would rest on the creek. They were still at work when Watt came furiously riding down the slope, waving his hat. He was on the ground before his horse could some to a stop.

"There's a round score of them. They'll be here soon," he announced. "Doble, you get the horses inside. Enoch, drop a tree or two along the bank of the creek. I'll gather drift and loose stuff to build up the weak spots. I believe they'll try to bag us from the other side of the creek where they can get close without being seen."

"You fellers will need all your time. I can git my hoss inside——"

"I said horses," reminded Watt.

"He means he won't leave even a Missouri sheriff, who's trying to earn blood-money, to stand off that red crowd single-handed," snarled Fair as he grabbed up his ax and ran into the grove.

"Step lively, Mr. Sheriff. My friend has the right of it. You were born a white man."

And Watt began gathering dead branches and tearing off leafy boughs to mask more thoroughly the hastily improvised barricade.

Fair felled a tall elm with a woodsman's precision, dropping it along the edge of the bank. Running up the bank he began on another tree and was well under way when the sheriff shouted a warning and fired his rifle as a fringe of heads showed along the top of the ridge. The heads vanished, and there came the long-drawn-out cry of triumph. Fair continued with his work, and the second tree crashed to the ground, its head crossing that of the first. As it fell in place an arrow spent itself among the interlaced branches.

"Some of them are on the other side of the creek," he yelled to Watt.

Watt threw an armful of brush on the elms and urged:

"Go back to Doble and see how it looks. I'll stand guard here and call out if I need you."

Fair found the sheriff flat on the ground, his rifle thrust from under a log. There was no sign of the enemy on the south side of the creek. Realizing the red men could not charge from the ridge without the sheriff having ample time to give the alarm Watt stole back to Fair. All was quiet on the north bank. For twenty minutes the three white men remained silent, fighting their nerves, as they expected each second to behold the Indians charging them. But the Indians were confident they had the game in the bag, and did not intend to lose any lives in making a capture.

It required years to develop a warrior, while the Oregon and California migrations had taught the red men that there was no counting the white race. This particular band of Cheyennes had been favorably disposed to the whites until this year of 1856. They were of one of the most warlike and fearless people on the continent. Fighting to them was not merely a means to an end, but life itself. In the estimation of this proud people a warrior's death was infinitely preferable than an old age spent on the cold side of a lodge. But to lose a trained warrior while exterminating three wandering white men would be a cruel waste. And the Cheyennes waited, silent as snakes and as deadly as the most poisonous serpent, determined to take a rare revenge for the destruction of the big war-pipe.

At last the silence was broken by a warrior calling out from the timber on the north side of the creek. Watt endeavored to locate the man by the sound of his voice, but learned nothing more than the general direction. The man was demanding a surrender, but none of the besieged understood his speech. After he had repeated his request several times Watt called back—

"Go to ——!"

At the sound of his voice several guns were discharged toward his hiding-place. Then in English a man cried:

"You come out; you live. You hide; you die."

Watt fired where something had slightly disturbed a clump of bushes, and instantly arrows rained into the screen before him and several bullets hit the trunk behind which he was crouching. He softly called to Fair:

"Keep low and quiet, Enoch. I'm changing my position a bit."

Doble did not believe the Indians would attempt a charge in the open and loudly announced he was coming to help hold the creek. Watt commanded him to keep back, and added:

"You can watch the timber down-stream. We don't need you here."

This conversation brought more arrows and bullets into the grove.

"They're up to something," Fair whispered. "I believe they'll cross above or below and try to work in through the timber on both ends. They haven't tried to shoot the horses. That shows they're sure of getting us."

"Well, up to this second we're just as safe as if we were up in New England," growled Watt.

The creek was high from the recent rain, and when a log floated by Fair eyed it longingly, and wished it was added to their barricade. From the woods across the stream came the sound of hatchets, and the comrades wondered what the red men were doing. Another log passed down the current and set Fair to speculating on their chances of slipping away at night, with one arm over a log. It would be a desperate chance and would mean, did they escape the immediate danger, a most hazardous journey of some twenty miles on foot before they could strike the Oregon road.

Even did they gain the Big Blue their ultimate escape to Fort Kearny would be largely a matter of luck. Yet he nursed the idea and put it in the back of his mind as a possible expedient did night find them alive. Had the sheriff's horse been fit for traveling he would have suggested they make a dash while the greater number of the foe was on the north side of the creek. Such a move undoubtedly would have resulted in death or capture within a very few miles.

But Fair had yet to learn that a white man, well-armed and behind cover, could stand off a considerable number of red men. Then some portion of his brain began jogging his recollection of things learned in the north woods. He began to dwell on the appearance of trees and logs and in water, and to recall the difference between those freshly cut and those that had been "hung up" during the Spring drive and reclaimed the following season.

Already he had observed pieces of drift floating by his hiding-place, and had mechanically classed them with "hung up" drift, recaptured by the recent freshet. But this tree-trunk, now sluggishly coming down-stream and practically denuded of branches, did not ride as high in the water as the more seasoned timber did. And where branches had been torn off there remained shredded fibers that curled at the ends, suggesting the presence of sap.

"Behind the tree coming down-stream, Watt," he murmured.

And he aimed at the rear end and close to the waterline and fired his rifle.

A head bobbed into view, the mouth opened wide in a yell of pain, then vanished as the wounded man frantically paddled to the north shore, one leg trailing helplessly. Almost at the same moment the entire length of the tree-trunk showed animation, as hands appeared clutching the wet bark, or grasping knives, hatchets and war-clubs. The progress of the log changed, and it began to approach the white men. From the north bank came a rattling fire of bullets and arrows. Watt reacted after a moment or two, and shattered a brawny hand showing at the front end of the log.

He then commenced raking the top of the log with his hand-guns. The Indians, not daring to show their heads, retreated by ducking beneath the muddy current and swimming down-stream. Watt stuffed a cartridge into his rifle and crawled along the bank to make sure none of the enemy were hiding beneath it. When he reached the end of the barricade he was satisfied not a man had effected a landing; and he took time to reload his revolvers.

"Dead Indian number one floating down," called out Fair.

Watt soon saw it, a limp figure, face down and with arms and legs outstretched, half-submerged and suggesting a gigantic frog. It seemed remarkable that they had actually killed one of the wily savages; and it restored much of Fair's faith in himself. Watt, too, was feeling more confident as from behind a tree he watched the gruesome object. Then he received the surprize of his life as the supposed dead man suddenly swerved to the north shore. Before he could comprehend what was happening the Indian had darted up the bank and was shouting derisively.

Watt gasped—

"I'll never believe an Injun is dead till I've cut off his head."

Fair guessed shrewdly when he said:

"Chances are he crawled under the bank, but didn't have any weapons. Took that chance to escape."

The audacity of the enemy in attempting to gain a footing inside the defense, and the narrow margin of his failure, affected the comrades conversely. Watt was highly pleased with the adventure and felt a certain degree of contempt for the foe. Fair was greatly perturbed. He considered his timely discovery of the ruse was merely a bit of luck. And who could foretell what new game the red men would be attempting? Then there was the discouraging fact that out of all the bullets they had shot into the creek they had, so far as they knew, wounded but two men and had killed none.

"Slippery cusses," admitted Watt.

"Next time we may not wake up in time," Fair muttered.

Doble's anxious voice was calling out for the third time—

"All right over there?"

Being reassured he surprized them by asking—

"Are there any coons in this country?"

"Don't know and don't care," answered Fair, his eyes glued to the north bank of the creek.

"Well, something too big for a squirrel is up in one of these trees. I heard him."

Watt and Fair flopped on their backs and stared into the green branches overhead. They could discover nothing suspicious.

"Must have been a squirrel or a bird," Watt decided.

"Noise was big enough for a coon," muttered the sheriff. "Gitting darned lonesome over here. Not a sign of a red."

"You're lucky," grunted Fair. "Watch for the coon. We'll eat him."

The sheriff accepted this advice seriously, and shifted his attention from the empty slope to the green canopy overhead. He held his long-barrel Colt half-raised and reclined with his head resting against a log. When he had described the noise as being "big" he had not meant that it was loud, but that the prolongation of the sound suggested the passing of a much larger animal than a squirrel. The disturbance had ceased before he had spoken to his companions, and by the time he had turned on his back the interlaced branches were quiet enough.

As he stared up at the foliage and listened to the murmuring voices of his companions he decided the disturbance had been caused by a bird. He had observed no birds in the grove, but he knew a crow would make much of a fuss in lighting on a branch. The Indians across the creek were silent. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his plug and tore off a fresh chew and was concluding that the gun-fire had frightened the bird or creature from the tree-tops when his attention was attracted by a bit of a phenomenon.

Out of the green roof one thick branch was slowly settling, as if sinking under a heavy weight. There was no wind to cause the disturbance, nor was there any noise attending it. Slowly the branch sagged and the sheriff perceived two brown objects resting on it. They were close together and were of peculiar shape for bird or tree-animal. He stared and waited for the heads of the strange creatures to appear; but although the branch bent yet lower the figures merely elongated and did not terminate in heads as they should. It was all very puzzling. Then suddenly the two objects joined together, and Doble babbled:

"—— me! If they ain't a pair of legs!"

And as the dusky form started to drop down on the unsuspecting comrades the long Colt coughed loudly, and Watt yelled in amazement as the dead Cheyenne fell between him and Fair, the bronzed arm outstretched, and the fist driving a long knife into the ground.

In a voice that panted with excitement Doble cried:

"There's your coon! Reckon we won't eat him!"

The Indians across the creek continued quiet, not yet understanding all that had happened because the savage had died before he could cry out. The dead man had a stuffed kingfisher tied in his scalp lock, and around his neck was hung a whistle made from the bone of an eagle's wing. Thus protected by the kingfisher medicine he believed he could not miss his victim, while the whistle would make him bullet-proof. The white men knew nothing about this, so they could not know that the fellow had invited death by a bullet by failing to blow the whistle just before making the attack.

Watt and Fair lifted the warrior and threw him over the logs into the creek. Not until the body splashed in the water did the hidden enemy realize what had happened. A chorus of wild howls greeted the dramatic appearance of the slain warrior; and the three white men braced themselves to meet an attack in force. Truth was, however, the Cheyennes, composed largely of young and ambitious men, were in a very bad way from the red point of view. To them had been intrusted the important task of carrying the war-pipe to the Oglala Dakotas, and the keeper of the sacred medicine-arrows had warned them to complete their errand without turning aside to follow a war-path.

They had been further warned that did they attempt to count coup they would do so at great risk as they would not have the protection of the tribal medicine. They had been diverted from their important business by the chance to kill a white man. The chase had led to two more whites. Therefore their rage against the besieged was tempered by the fear their medicine was angry with them. After the howling had ceased one of the older warriors strongly urged that the fight be abandoned; not because he doubted the outcome, but for fear of further alienating the medicine.

The others of the band, however, insisted they could not turn back, or proceed with a broken pipe to the Oglalas, without having scalps to show for the man they had lost. It was argued by the hot-bloods that the man was killed because he had not obeyed his personal medicine. Had he blown the eagle-whistle he would have made a kill and escaped by jumping into the creek.

While this discussion was going on the white men clutched their guns and waited for the enemy to attempt reprisal. Doble dolefully called out:

"I fetched all this trouble on you two. I'm mighty sorry."

"We won't talk about it," discouraged Watt.

"It's bothering me a heap," persisted Doble. "Tell you what I'll do if we git clear of this mess, I'll give you the same start you had when you first saw me. Ain't that fair and han'some enough?"

"You'll never arrest me whether I have a start or not. Stop talking and get back to your post. You've done us a good turn by shooting that cuss out of the tree. Evens up any help we gave you at the river. We're quits."

Doble took a fresh chew and crawled back to the barricade and carefully reloaded the chamber of his hand-gun.

"Now what are they up to?" whispered Fair, as the silence across the creek was broken by new sounds.

"Sounds like they were breaking up branches."

"Dry branches at that. Hear them snap? They're going to try and burn us out!"

"Everything's too green and wet. Then again, they can't start a fire over here."

From the growth at the edge of the northern bank came more crackling sounds, as fire ate greedily through a mass of dry twigs and branches. For a moment the patch of flames was visible to the watchers; then was smothered by green grass and leaves. At several points other fires were started, and the different columns of smoke began to merge and form a wall. The reek of it reached behind the felled trees. Fair coughed and warned—

"Trying to smoke us out!"

"Worse'n that," uneasily muttered Watt. "They're planning to cross under cover of the smoke."

The smoke rose higher and began bellying out over the creek where the pull of the faint breeze carried it down-stream. More fires were started farther up the creek so the smoke would have a chance to cross the stream and fill the woods. The white men's horses snorted and pulled at their picket-ropes. Watt shouted for Doble to stand by the animals and keep them under control, and further advised him to move them closer to the barricade so he might guard against a surprize attack from the open. Fair placed two rifle cartridges before him and placed his ax at his side. The smoke now stretched along the north bank like a curtain, swaying outward, then sucking back as the breeze lessened.

"They'll be coming soon," warned Watt as the smoke developed a tendency to sweep across the stream.

"Shoot into it," urged Fair. "We'll have time to reload."

And he raised his rifle and fired where the smoke was the thickest. Watt did likewise, and the two Sharp's were quickly reloaded.

"Try up-stream while I take the other end," advised Fair. "They'll cross above and below us."

This time a howl answered Watt's shot and the Indians poured in a volley of bullets and arrows.

The smoke responded to a puff of wind and advanced over the creek. Behind it came the scrambling of feet down the bank and much splashing as the warriors took to the water.

"Fire low!" yelled Watt as he discharged his rifle. Fair fired, and Watt was emptying his two hand-guns when the wind whimsically veered and snatched back the screen. With empty guns the comrades beheld a line of dark forms frantically making back into the woods. Two were limping and being helped along by their friends. A third was streaming blood from a hole in his shoulder. Three times had the warriors learned the evil of taking a path against the advice of the keeper of the sacred medicine-arrows. The stratagem of the floating logs, the cunning of the warrior depending on the kingfisher medicine, and the smoke attack had all failed.

"Some new deviltry!" puffed Watt, disheartened by the ingenious persistency of the enemy.

Fair's face was that of an old man as he strained his eyes and endeavored to glimpse the enemy through the smoke. The sound of their feet, hurrying through the growth, left no doubt in his mind that the last charge was under way. Voices called and were answered, and yet none of the foe showed himself at the edge of the bank. The hurrying steps continued with no attempt to conceal the movement; and Fair called out to his friend—

"They're making up-stream!"

"They will cross above the bend and sneak down through the timber on our side. Some are waiting across the crick most likely to attack while we're trying to stand off the other band. And that will just about finish us, Old Sober Face."

As he finished speaking Watt stole to Fair's side and thrust out his hand for a farewell grip, then turned to resume his study of the north bank.

There was no doubt about the main body crossing to the south side of the creek. The bend concealed them from view, but their noisy passage told what the eye did not perceive. Fair posted himself to discover them when they came through the woods. Watt kept his gaze fixed on the opposite bank, confident the onslaught would start from that quarter. They cried a warning to Doble to be ready to give his assistance. But the voices of the enemy, now south of the creek gradually grew fainter, indicating that a part of them at least, had fallen back a considerable distance.

Then Doble startled the comrades by yelling—

"Here they come!"

Fair darted to reinforce him, but Watt hung back, still fearing a surprise attack from the silent north bank. Fair and Doble fired their rifles at the widely flung line of horsemen up the grassy slope. The Cheyennes replied with bullets and arrows, then wheeled about and galloped over the top of the ridge and disappeared.

"They're gone! They're gone!" exulted Fair, running back to Watt. The latter yanked him to the ground, still suspicious of a trap, and said:

"Trying to make us think so. But I reckon they left enough bloody —— across there to sneak over and pot us just as we're thinking we're safe. They'd never quit when there's only the three of us."

Nor would the Cheyennes have retreated even had there been a dozen or more of the whites if not for the conviction their tribal medicine was displeased with them and was balking their purpose. But now that they believed the ill-omened breaking of the war-pipe presaged the disasters suffered in the grove they were not too proud to flee from the wrath of a hostile medicine. The grove suddenly was become taboo. But the white men understood nothing of this, and they refused to mount and take to the open until night came to aid them. They took time to examine their horses. None had been hit and the sheriff's animal appeared to be in much better condition.

It was Fair who detected the long dark stain on the sheriff's shirt. Doble admitted he was hit when the Indians fired from the smoke. An examination revealed a flesh wound along the short ribs on the right side, the bullet having done no damage beyond furrowing the flesh. The sheriff had dressed it with a handkerchief, and he was worrying more about his black coat than the hurt. He picked the garment from a branch and sorrowfully pointed out the bullet hole, and lamented:

"In another jiffy I'd have taken it off to fight at close quarters. Now it's spoiled."

"Keep it off. We'll fight at close quarters yet," said Watt. "They're hiding behind that ridge."

"I think they sneaked back across the crick," said the sheriff nervously. "You two go back and watch the crick for a few minutes."

Instantly the fear of an attack from the north bank seized upon the two comrades and they crept to the edge of the stream. Scarcely had they taken their positions before they heard the noise of a horse galloping away from the barricade.

"Good Lawd! Can he have bolted?" gasped Watt.

They ran to the breastworks and beheld the sheriff riding up the grassy slope.

"He'll be killed!" yelled Fair. "Hi! You fool! Come back!"

But Doble galloped on and gained the crest. They saw him halt and remain motionless for a count of ten. Each second they expected to see him pitch from the saddle. Then he was waving his hat over his head and coming back at a furious gallop, shouting incoherently; and they stood ready to cover his retreat.

He tumbled from the horse and hysterically screamed:

"They're gone! They're gone! They're licked! They've mizzled!"

Watt shook him heartily and at last he explained:

"I seen 'em riding in a bunch and racing like mad for the Republican! Just so many teeny figures way down the divide. Boys, we won a mighty big victory."

Watt sneered and exclaimed:

"And they tell about Injuns being fighters! And twenty of them couldn't whip three white men who're new to the country and the red way of fighting! Never again will my heart drop into my boots when I see a feather in a top-knot. Why, one of my overseers with a long whip could lick the fight out of a whole band of them!"

Fair was deeply puzzled. He and his companions had not inflicted enough damage to dishearten a determined foe. But he could not dispute the evidence of the sheriff's eyes. He could only say:

"Well, thank God, they've quit us! Still it's a fact the Indians have killed off lots of white men—men who were better fighters than we'll ever be."

"I reckon we fought our bigness," Watt complacently retorted. "What next?"

Now the common danger was ended their relations once more became complicated and delicate. The two of them glanced at Doble. He understood the silent query and slowly cut off a huge chew of tobacco and said:

"To make for Riley would be to chase along after them critters. I say to keep on to the Big Blue and then follow it down to

Manhattan. That'll cut off considerable travel and we won't need to go to Riley."

"What about me having as much of a start as there was distance between us when we first saw you?" demanded Watt.

Doble sighed, but redeemed his promise by agreeing:

"You shall have it. Want it now? My hoss ain't exactly in racing condition."

Watt thought rapidly. He and Fair would not be going out of their way did they make the Blue and follow the Oregon road to Fort Kearny.

"We'll wait till we strike the Blue," he decided. "By that time your horse will be in better condition if we can take our time. I won't jump without giving you due notice. Am I under arrest?"

The sheriff smiled grimly and shook his head.

"You ain't under arrest. If you was I couldn't let you try to git away. That would be going against my duty. As yet I ain't said a word about arresting anybody. We'll ride along just like brothers till we fetch the Blue. Then we'll make different arrangements."

Now the excitement was over they discovered they were very hungry. Watering the horses and picketing them in the grass they took time to eat. When they swung into the saddle their shadows were long before them and they knew it would be dark long before they reached the river. As they galloped along Watt curiously inquired—

"You're the fellow who boarded the boat at Lexington?"

"Same feller. Hunting for you. Yes, sir! Held up a man named Prairie Palmer thinking he was you. Young man, do you know you've made me a heap of trouble?"

"It must be very satisfying to know you haven't inconvenienced *me* any," was the angry retort.

CHAPTER X

THE PRICE OF BEING *HEYOKA*

BECAUSE of a suspicious smoke showing down the Big Blue the three travelers decided to ride up-stream instead of south to Manhattan on the Fort Riley road. Aside from the thin streak of smoke they had seen nothing to suggest the presence of Indians. Late afternoon, when within a few miles of where the Oregon road crosses the river near the mouth of the Little Blue, Fair's horse gave out, and despite their eagerness to make Fort Kearny with all possible dispatch they were compelled to go into camp among some cottonwoods.

Sheriff Doble, greatly disappointed because the smoke blocked the road to Manhattan, grew more cheerful as his companions announced their belief there would be no hindrance to their making Kearny on the Platte.

"If you two say there ain't nothing to stop us from booming right through to the fort I 'low we're good as there. You know this country and its ways better'n I do."

"We were about fifteen miles ahead of you when we entered this country," reminded Fair, his gaze growing cold as he stared at their Nemesis.

Having placed his travel worries aside for the time being Watt eyed the sheriff sullenly, and asked:

"What chance to run for it? When am I to have that? You keep putting it off."

Doble fetched a long sigh and reasoned:

"Wouldn't we be a fine passel of fools to separate so long as we know the Injuns are out? I'd go plumb crazy out here if I was alone. You'll have your start and a good one."

"We don't propose to wait till we reach the fort," Fair told him.

"Then you two ain't reckoning on going to the fort!" exclaimed the sheriff. "There'd be no sense in racing to see who'd get there first. Where you reckoning on mizzling to?"

"That's part of the game," explained Watt, smiling slightly. "You find out by chasing and overhauling us."

Doble chewed his cud fiercely and cried: "Now look here. This won't do. You two are just the same as saying I'm onery and playing a low-down game on you by trying to get you to the fort so's I can back out of my bargain. I don't hanker to be left alone in this —— country. But if you want to make it a race this minute you can light out. You'll want to go with your partner, Fair, and your hoss is no good. Say you'll keep together and you can have a extry long start."

The sportsmanship of this offer appealed to Watt, and he replied:

"Sheriff, I reckon we were forgetting that lame horse. Nor will we quit you so long as there is a chance of the Injuns gobbling you up. We'll push along together till we all know we're out of danger; then we'll arrange for the race. I'll simply repeat that you'll never arrest me."

"There you go again!" exploded the sheriff. "That word is always in your mouth. I don't use it."

"That's a silly evasion," sternly denounced Watt. "We know you're not out here for your health."

"God forbid! Ain't I been frank to say I come to find you? On t'other hand, no matter what you find yourselves thinking I wish you'd believe that Doble of Missouri can't ever forget how we three stood together back on that crick."

"That's all mighty fine, but still you insist on seeing this thing through." This from Fair.

Doble nodded slowly and gravely admitted:

"Of course it's got to be settled. But every one will get a square shake."

This conversation left the three divided and Doble, as if feeling his company was not desired, wandered deeper into the grove, then swung back to its edge. He was hungry for companionship and could not bear to keep at any distance from the fire Fair had now lighted. The comrades thought the Indians had caught him when he gave a wild yell and leaped frantically toward them.

As they grabbed for their guns he tottered to the fire and gasped:

"Darndest big rattler you ever see. Heard him rattle but my mind was wandering. Must a reckoned it was a big grasshopper. First thing I knew I was almost on top of him. Reckon they heard me squall way over on the Republican. Take the ax and let's go and finish him."

But Watt's sympathies just then were with the hunted, and he objected, saying:

"What's the use to kill one snake. Poor —— was here first. Probably dozens of them around. Anyway, he's a gentleman beside an Injun. He did give you warning. Keep by the fire and be sure there's none near it. We'll be pulling out from here soon as Fair's nag can travel."

After that incident the three became silent. The fire was between the comrades and the sheriff. They ate their supper with scarcely any talk, and as the sun sank and night rushed over the rolling prairie they brought their horses closer to the camp. Doble examined Fair's horse and shook his head despondently; so they resigned themselves to spending the night there. The two friends sat side by side, smoking their pipes and occasionally exchanging a word. The ostracised sheriff ceased his attempts to join in the conversation and lay stretched out at full length on the ground and watched his companions through half-closed lids.

Watt whispered to Fair:

"We'll get him up to the fort and then turn back down the river. He won't relish following us. We'll make the Santa Fé trail yet."

"But no lingering on the Riley road. People at the fort and along the way east probably know we're wanted by this time."

"Know I'm wanted, not you," glumly corrected Watt. Then more cheerfully. "Still, Old Sober Face, you did jump your bail. I can say I chased you to bring you back and to save my money."

The conceit amused him and he chuckled softly.

Up jerked the sheriff's head, but it was not Watt's soft laugh that had aroused him. Crouching on his heels and turning his head from side to side he warned:

"Hoss coming at a gallop! My ear was to the ground. Heard it plain. Best hide the fire!"

They had heard nothing, but so sensitive were they to a recurrence of the red danger that without pausing to question the sheriff's words they kicked the fire to pieces and ran to the river and brought water in their hats and threw it upon the embers. Then each man stood at the head of his horse, hand on nose, to prevent the animal from whinnying. The rapid beat of hoofs could now be plainly heard, coming down the river.

"Shod hoss!" whispered the sheriff.

Then back of this staccato sound was a thrumming and drumming, much less pronounced and yet very ominous. Each of the three men jumped convulsively as a demoniac howl ripped through the night. Then they heard the horseman in the lead curse in English, and the next moment he had swerved into the grove and was almost upon them before they could make out his figure.

"You're white?" demanded Watt, resting his revolver across the back of his horse.

"Yes. So are you!" exclaimed a startled voice. "How many of you?"

"Three. Who are you? And what's the matter? Who follows you?"

"I'm Prairie Palmer trying to dodge a small war-party of Oglala. Been chased all day. Hoss played out. Keep quiet. They'll perhaps pass you by."

And he was reining about to continue his hopeless flight and lead the red men away from the grove when Fair seized his arm and explained:

"Hale Watt and Enoch Fair. We haven't forgot that you showed us where to squat on Mill Creek. Stick tight if it'll help your chances."

"Glory be! Such a small world!" gasped Palmer.

Then he attempted to shake off the detaining hand, and snarled:

"Let go you fool! They'll be here in half a minute. There's twenty-five or more of them. They're after me. I can lead them away."

"With a played-out horse," growled Watt, yanking him to the ground. "We'd feel fine when we heard them killing you within a few rods of this place."

"——! Now you've spoiled it! Here they come! On your life don't offer any fight if they spot us."

A black blotch of horsemen swept down a little ridge and were vaguely outlined against the pale stars. Back of them sounded the pursuit-yell of the rest of the band. Those in the lead might have passed the grove had not one of them caught the aroma of wood-smoke. He ejaculated something in a guttural voice, and before the white men could change their positions they were ringed about by the horsemen. Guns clicked and arrows were drawn to the head. Prairie Palmer called out in the Teton dialect:

"Why do you aim guns at your friends? Make a fire and look before you shoot."

The chorus of triumphant howls subsided and a Dakota demanded—

"Why did the white man run if he is a friend of the Oglalas?"

"He knew his three friends here were coming along this road. He rode to meet them and be with them when the Oglala came up so they would not be killed. I am the friend of Running Antelope. My friends are his friends."

"The white man says he is the friend of the Hunkpapa chief?" fiercely asked the spokesman for the Indians.

"They say the chief of many coups is always glad to see his white friend," composedly replied Palmer.

"This man is a liar," spoke up another voice. "The medicine of Bone Arrow smelled the smoke of a dead fire. His medicine says new medicine-shirts will soon be made from white skins."

"Light fires," commanded the leader. "We will see what we have caught in the trap."

Deft hands quickly deprived the four men of their weapons and they were closely hedged about by the Indians while wood was being collected and set to blazing. Others of the band streamed into the grove and yelped with frantic joy on learning of the capture, the rearmost yelling to those up the little ridge, "*Hiyu po! Hiyu po!*"*

As the flames leaped up Fair, Watt and Doble surrendered all hope as they beheld the ferocious, exulting faces of the threatening savages. The sheriff jerked back his head as skinning-knives were thrust close to his eyes. Palmer standing motionless and with no expression disturbing his stolid features, hissed from the corner of his mouth:

"Stand still! Don't act scared."

This particular band was largely composed of the Kit-Fox society, and were to be distinguished from the others by the skin of the little animal worn around the neck, the tail hanging down behind. To the nose of the fox was fastened the small medicine-bag containing four dried or powdered herbs. The feet, edges, and ears of the skin were worked with porcupine quills and tiny bells. The latter gave off a thin tinkling as the men stamped and danced around their victims. The jaw-bone of the fox was fastened to the forehead by a strip of skin, and was painted red and blue, the ancient colors which Unktehi, the earth and water gods, Takuskanskan the moving god, and the Heyoka, the anti-natural gods, had taught the first Dakotas to use.

Crow feathers, placed sidewise on the back of the head, were surmounted by two eagle feathers standing upright.

Fair and Watt maintained better control of their features than did Doble. The sheriff gave a sharp howl when an Arikara, with a red hand painted across his mouth to show he had killed an enemy and had drunk his blood, shoved his fierce visage close and drew the back of his knife across the perspiring forehead of the Missouri man. To counteract this sign of weakness Palmer loudly jeered:

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*Come on! Come on!

"Let this brother of the Pawnee go and wave his knife in the face of Running Antelope, chief of the Hunkpapa. They say Running Antelope counts many coups against the Arikara."

This double reference to the Hunkpapa's many Arikara victims and their linguistic affiliation with the Pawnees, ancient enemies of both Cheyennes and Dakotas, displeased the warrior; and with a scream of rage he attempted to throw himself upon the plainsman.

The leader of the band, wearing no paint on his face and armed with a revolver and a hatchet, thrust the Arikara back saying:

"Let our adopted brother not kill too quick. He has a mighty medicine, but let him stand back and wait. Tasunkakokipapi* will know when it is time for the white men to die. Let more fires be built. Let the Oglalas eat and look after their ponies. Tasunkakokipapi's medicine is very strong. He runs after one man and catches four."

"It is the medicine of Bone Arrow that caught the four men," hissed the Arikara.

And he held out four glass beads in his hand so the firelight might play upon them, and with excellent legerdemain caused them to disappear.

"His medicine told him the white men were here when his brothers would ride by like blind men. His medicine now tells him the white men will kick and squeal when they feel the skinning-knives."

Yet he did not again attempt to attack the prisoners; and while more fires were being lighted in a large circle Palmer found time to explain:

"They've chased me for twenty-four hours. I'll try to lie out of it. They're hunting for a band of Cheyennes, who belong to the same society, the Fox, and who were to bring them a war-pipe and then help them wipe out the Pawnee village on Grand Island a few miles below Fort Kearny. The boss of this band is the one the whites call Young Man Afraid of His Horses. The feller he pushed aside makes beads by melting glass into molds he got from some trader. They think the beads are big medicine. How'd you folks git way up here?"

Watt hurriedly related the adventure with the Indians between the Blue and the Republican and how the fight began with the smashing of a long pipe carried by one of the warriors.

"That's why they quit you. They was bringing the pipe to the Dakotas and had to go for another. They hate the Pawnees like poison. Pawnees stole their medicine-arrers. Dakotas got 'em and sold 'em for a hundred ponies to the Cheyennes. Kiowas have sent a war-pipe that the Oglala have accepted. Now the Oglala are waiting for the Cheyenne pipe. Once they git that they'll start a general war against the Pawnees."

"We ought to be leaving here before the Cheyennes get hold of another pipe and come along and point us out as the fellows who busted the first one," whispered Fair.

"We can't leave any too quick—if we get a chance. But you fellers keep your nerve."

"How did you happen up here? Thought you'd gone to trade," said Watt.

"Took a big trade in Mexican blankets up the Oregon road. And like a derned fool I traded for robes at the Grand Island Pawnee village. Oughter carried my trade to the Oglala. If they find out about the blankets going to the Pawnee they'll surely wear my hide for a medicine-shirt. But they don't know it yet. If I can make 'em believe I'm a friend of the Hunkpapa Dakota chief, Running Antelope, it'll give us a breathing spell. We must trust to our medicine-luck."

"Mebbe he'll show up in time to save us all," timidly suggested the sheriff.

Prairie Palmer smiled grimly and dashed Doble's hopes by informing him—

"If the Antelope could get his paws on me he'd cut me up just as they take a buffalo apart in the *wakan* way."

The sheriff groaned. Palmer sharply commanded him to show a better face, and added:

"We ain't dead yet. My medicine is pretty strong. You fellers call it 'luck.' I'm gambling that Running Antelope is on the upper Missouri just now."

They Fear Even His Horses came up to Palmer and warned:

"It is bad to talk too much. A tongue, like a pony, gets tired."

"I was telling my friends that a voice

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*They Fear Even His Horses. Incorrectly called, Young Man Afraid Of His Horses.

from Taku wankan tipi* just whispered in my ear for the white men to be strong of heart; that Running Antelope and his Hunkpapas will soon be here to take me and my friends by the hand."

"Our eyes shall see. Our ears shall hear," replied the chief. "My young men tell me the white trader took many goods up the Great Medicine road of the white man (Oregon Trail)."

"Your young men when scouting for signs have eyes like the eagle. I could not find the Oglala and trade with them. I left my goods at the white man's fort. Go back there with me and I will make a trade."

"Did you bring guns?" asked the chief.

"I brought Mexican blankets."

"Bone Arrow, our medicine-man, says you talk with a crooked tongue. Very soon the Oglala will know the truth. Bone Arrow was an Arikara. Now he is an Oglala Dakota. He makes new medicine. It will tell us all things. He is a heyoka man.** He wears the swallow medicine on his head, and his horse is swift as the swallow. He has seen the Nine Riders coming in a cloud, each on a horse of a different color. He has seen the Nine Riders from the north, all on white horses. He has painted his pony with streaks of lightning. He led us to you and the other white men in the darkness. He says his medicine will tell us how you must die."

Palmer stared at the Arikara medicine-man with a mighty fear worrying his heart. It had been a most favorable omen that he had been able to avert instant death. Now he must believe that the reprieve was granted merely to allow the medicine-man time to talk with the Thunderbirds and learn just how the white men should be tortured. Bone Arrow met the plainsman's gaze and returned it with an expression of gloating. The fellow's pony was black, so that the zigzag white markings would show conspicuously. Palmer knew that one who had dreamed of Thunderbirds must possess a very powerful medicine. Throwing himself on the ground and motioning his companions to do likewise and pretend to feel at ease the plainsman told the chief:

"There is no fight between the Oglala and the white men. Why are we treated like Pawnees? Did not Putinska† have a peace-smoke with the Dakotas at Fort Pierre only a few moons ago when the new grass was first showing?"

"White man, you know too much, or too little, to speak the truth," sternly rebuked the chief. "Your tongue is crooked or foolish. The Oglalas did not go to the peace-talk at Pierre.‡ Who told you the Oglalas wanted your Mexican blankets?"

"My friends among the Kiowas told me the Oglala would trade dressed robes for the striped blankets."

They Fear Even His Horses stared long and steadily at Palmer, but the gaze of the white man remained serene and unfaltering. Then the chief ironically remarked:

"The white trader is a friend of Running Antelope of the Hunkpapas, of the Oglalas, and of the Kiowas. He has so many red friends he should come and live with them."

"I am here among my friends the Oglalas," was the prompt reply.

The chief approved of this retort, but reminded him:

"The trader can not say these other white men are friends of the Hunkpapas, the Oglalas and the Kiowas. They have left no blanket-trade at the Platte fort for the Oglalas."

Palmer knew the chief was playing with him, yet he maintained his calm bearing and boldly returned:

"They came to help me with my trade. My smoke covers them. They are safe."

Admiration twinkled in the beady eyes, for the Oglala leader, right-hand man of the famous Red Cloud, knew a brave man when he met him. The warriors, keenly interested in the dialog, had kept back, but Bone Arrow believed it was time for him to take the lead in the situation. The fires were burning in a wide circle and brightly illuminating the grove. The Arikara man attracted attention to himself by moaning and crying that his spirit had been to the great medicine-lodge of the Thunderbirds and that the Wakinyan had whispered to him to scotch a snake before the sun rose; and he added that the Thunderers told him the snake was white and walked like a man.

There was but one interpretation of this announcement, and Palmer was glad his companions did not understand. Bone Arrow, true to his rôle of a heyoka man, pulled a buffalo-robe around his perspiring body and hugged a fire until the odor of burning hair was perceptible, and shivered and pretended to be very cold. Then he retired from the fire and discarded the robe, and the medicine-shirt decorated with four scalps, and fanned himself with feathers attached to his medicine-rattle, to demonstrate he was uncomfortably warm. He who is associated with the anti-natural gods is the antithesis of his fellows. He groans and laments in expressing joy, and laughs and claps his hands as an evidence of sorrow. In Summer he shivers beneath heavy coverings, and in Winter will pretend to be warm when wearing only a breech-clout. He goes by contraries, except when he forgets, and often furnishes much amusement for the young and unthinking. But by men of mature thought and filled with the wisdome of years the heyoka man is held in an esteem that closely borders on awe. One who has the Thunderbirds for allies can not fail provided he keeps the promises he has made to them.

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* Dwelling place of the gods. **A dreamer of Thunderbirds.
†White Beard, or Mustache, Gen. Harney's Indian name.

‡A fact.

"I have dreamed of hawks," announced Palmer in a loud voice. "It is a very *wakan* dream."

"You have dreamed of the moon. You have talked with the Turtle Man who lives in the moon," hissed Bone Arrow. "That is very bad. The Wakinyan told me a white snake shall be scotched. The Wakinyan never lie."

"Our medicine-man has been to the tall mountain where the Thunderbirds live," muttered the chief, his gaze shifting from the prisoners to the medicine-man.

"I have sent my spirit to their lodge," boasted Bone Arrow. "I passed by the butterfly that stands in the entrance at the east. I saw the bear guarding the western entrance. I spoke to the deer guarding the north, and to the beaver in the entrance at the south. I stood before the Thunderers and they promised me a white snake to scotch before sunrise."

And for an instant the medicine-man's eyes darted toward the southern segment of the fire-circle and his face grimaced because of his pleasurable anticipation.

Palmer yawned, as if indifferent to the medicine-man's threat, and informed his companions:

"He's up to some deviltry. Rest of the band have waited for him to work some *wakan* stuff on us, or they'd had us skinned before now. Any of you heard any rattlers since you've been here?"

Watt told him of the big snake Doble had discovered. Palmer gritted his teeth.

"—— him! Chances are he's found that snake and can bring him in to make good his talk. The Injuns will believe him when he says the rattler stands for one, or all of us. See, he keeps turning his eyes outside the circle. Well, white men should always keep a stiff upper lip when with these beggars. They owe that much to their white skins."

There was scant encouragement in this speech, and Sheriff Doble clinched his hands until the nails cut into his palms. Watt and Fair endeavored to prepare their nerves for the worst by setting their jaws. They Fear Even His Horses stood to one side to give the medicine-man plenty of room. The warriors likewise fell back and enlarged the circle. Bone Arrow took his cue and put on his robe and began shivering and causing his teeth to chatter. He walked to a fire and warmed his hands over it; then passed to the next fire and again warmed his hands. Palmer observed he was working to the south of the circle, whither he had been directing his gaze. The plainsman sat up and watched him closely.

"I am promised a white snake," Bone Arrow chanted as he passed between two fires and out of the circle. "Friends, they really say I am promised a white snake to scotch. Wakinyan, I come. Behold me. My ears are open. Tell me what to do."

And he plugged his ears with his fingers as was to be expected of a *heyoka* man who listens for some message. The warriors stared after him in keen expectation of some dramatic happening.

TO BE CONTINUED

WHAT HAPPENED TO O'RILEY

by John L. Considine

THE miners of the small, isolated camps of the Old West were hard put to it for amusement. They had to furnish their own drama. The gunman provided the tragedy; the practical joker, the comedy. It was not until near the close of the sixties that the duel was finally thrown to the discard, and up to that time the fake duel was a fruitful source of merriment to the practical joker and his confidants. The victim of one such duel was Peter O'Riley, who, with his partner, McLaughlin, discovered the famous Comstock lode.

The duel took place in the very early days, before the discovery of the Comstock lode, when O'Riley was mining on Gold Cañon and along Sixmile Cañon. He was an honest, hard-working, good-natured, harmless kind of man, but when aroused displayed a most fierce and ungovernable temper. When he flew into a passion he was ready for any deed of rashness or to use any kind of weapon that first came to hand. Even then he showed, in this, signs of that insanity in which he ended his days.

The sham duel was got up at Johntown between O'Riley and a young man named Smith, a miner working in Gold Cañon. The cause was a girl who lived up in Carson Valley. Both O'Riley and Smith found pleasure in the smile of this girl, and the light of her eyes was as sunshine to their hearts. O'Riley was so badly smitten that he would visit and work all day on the ranch of her father without pay of any sort, except the somewhat unsubstantial remuneration of seeing her during the time he was taking his meals.

It was natural that a devotion so Quixotic should excite the mirth of the sentimental swain's miner-comrades, and that they should seek to turn it to account for their own amusement.

They found an easy opportunity in the fact that O'Riley could neither read nor write. It was a simple matter for them to frame up letters purporting to come from the girl and addressed to O'Riley. In answering those letters, he was obliged to depend on the very conspirators who were plotting to undo him. Finally the correspondence developed to a point where the fabricated letters assured him that the young woman was head over heels in love with him, but that she was equally so with Smith, and did not know how on earth she was going to choose between them. On the heels of this came another letter saying she had found a solution of the problem: the two suitors were to fight a duel, and she would marry the victor.

O'Riley, whose deepest emotions had been aroused, was heartily in favor of the idea, was ready to fight at once. Smith, whose part was pure comedy, at first declared his repugnance to the idea of bloodshed, but finally affected to be convinced by the persuasions of those who pointed out—for O'Riley's benefit, of course—that there was no other way to settle the rivalry.

Smith and O'Riley selected their seconds, who made all the arrangements. They reported to their principals that, as but one of them could have the girl, it seemed to them that the other one might as well be dead. They had, therefore, arranged for shotguns at twenty paces.

On the day appointed, the duelists, armed with shotguns, were placed in position. The word had gone the rounds, and every miner within a radius of five miles of Johntown was there. O'Riley, who was strictly on business bent, inquired of his second how much of a charge was in his shotgun.

"Nine revolver balls," the rascal assured him.

"That's good," said O'Riley. As a matter of fact, each shotgun was heavily charged with powder and paper-wads, and with nothing more.

The word was given and both men fired. But O'Riley was so bent on finishing his rival then and there that he turned loose with both barrels, firing his second almost before the smoke had drifted away from the muzzle of his first.

Smith fell to the ground, and his brother, who stood near, ran to him and plentifully smeared his breast with the chicken-blood he had been holding in the hollow of his hand. Crocodile tears flowed from the eyes of the fraternal mourner, and his lamentations could be heard a hundred yards away.

O'Riley was brought to the spot by his seconds. They inquired of Smith's seconds if their principal had received satisfaction. In response, Smith's brother drew a six-shooter on O'Riley, who turned to flee.

"You have killed my brother, now I'll kill you," shouted Smith, as he pursued O'Riley, who was now running like a deer, and making for the house of a neighbor, where he knew a loaded shotgun was kept.

As he ran, Smith's brother would take an occasional shot at the sky, which O'Riley, thinking it aimed at himself, would strive to elude by frantically zigzagging, a trick he had learned in Indian warfare.

The farce of the duel having been minutely rehearsed beforehand, the plotters anticipating that O'Riley would run for the shotgun he was now after, had rammed tremendous charges of powder into both barrels of the antiquated weapon, putting paper-wads on top.

Darting into the house and seizing this gun, O'Riley resumed his flight. But as he neared the brink of Gold Cañon, which he meant to cross, his pursuer pressed him so closely, firing his revolver at short range, that O'Riley felt himself forced to make a desperate stand, and so, facing about, he let drive. He had cocked both barrels of the gun, and both went off together, the breech striking him full on the nose and mouth, knocking him off his footing and sending him backward and downward, fifteen or twenty feet, to the bottom of the cañon. He regained his feet in an instant, however, and sped up the cañon like an antelope.

O'Riley was on a bee-line for the village of Franktown, twelve miles off, and he ran more than half the distance. There he remained in seclusion for two weeks. Johntown friends sent him word to come back and work his claim, that everything was all right, the duel a hoax, and Smith unharmed.

But O'Riley was not to be taken in by any such claptrap. He had seen Smith stretched out upon the ground, with his life-blood welling from his breast, and had heard his dying groans. If Smith's brother thirsted for gore, let him come and take it. O'Riley wasn't going to walk, open-eyed, into their pitfall.

The jokers finally thought the farce had gone far enough. Several of them went to Franktown to induce him to return with them, and brought with them convincing evidence in the person of the same Smith who was supposed to have been killed. When O'Riley perceived how he had been imposed upon, he flew into such a rage that the bystanders had a hard time to keep him from killing Smith on the spot. At last a treaty of peace was ratified, on condition that Smith was to resign all pretensions to the hand of the Carson Valley girl.

Time passed, the girl married another man, and O'Riley discovered the lode that afterwards yielded hundreds of millions in gold and silver. He held on to his interest longer than any of the others declared in on the original location, and received fifty thousand dollars when he did sell.

He was a man of simple tastes, and his money, placed at interest, would have yielded more than enough to supply his few wants. But he built a hotel with part of the money—fifty thousand dollars could go a long way in those days—and then, allowing parasites to persuade him that he was a money-making genius, a financial wizard, speculated in stocks with what remained. As he could neither read nor write, the parasites handled the money for him, and one day he found himself, like his colleague, Comstock, going forth with pick and pan to prospect, in the hope of finding another bonanza.

O'Riley was a spiritualist, and the spirits told him of a place in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains where there was more gold and silver than in the whole Comstock lode. To other miners, it was nothing more than a bed of rotten granite, but O'Riley knew better. The spirits would not deceive him.

The ground was full of water, and cave-ins were frequent in the tunnel which he drove. He would work for weeks, maybe, and then would come a cave-in of earth to wipe out what he had done and drive him back to where he had started. But he never lost faith in the spirits, and he would begin all over again, excavating the ground and replacing the timbers crushed by the last cave-in. Thus he toiled for years under difficulties and drawbacks that would have broken the heart of a saner man.

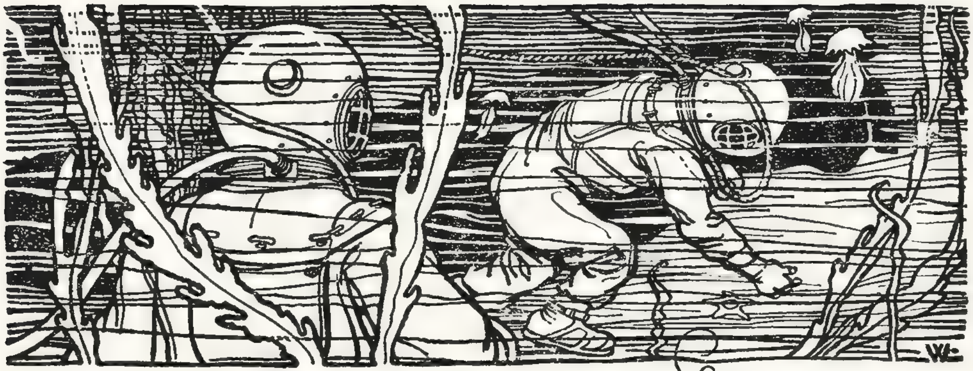
In other days he had made many friends, and they did not forsake him in the time of tribulation. He had no money, but they supplied all things needful in the way of food and tools.

"As he worked alone in his dark tunnel, month after month, far under the mountain," says William Wright, who knew him well, "the spirits began to grow more and more familiar. They swarmed about him, advising him and directing the work. As he wielded pick and sledge, their voices came to him out of the darkness which walled in the light of his solitary candle, cheering him on. Voices from the chinks in the rocks whispered to him stories of great masses of silver at no great distance ahead—of caverns floored with silver and roofed with great arches hung with stalactites of pure silver and glittering native gold.

"The spirits talked so much with him in his tunnel under the mountain, and had made themselves so familiar then, that at last they boldly conversed with him under the broad light of day, and in the city as well as in the solitudes of the mountains. He was heard muttering to them as he walked the street, and a wild and joyous light gleamed in his eyes as he listened to their promises of mountains of gold and caves of silver.

"News at length came that O'Riley had been caved on and badly hurt; then, that the physicians had pronounced him insane.

"When he recovered from his hurt he was anxious to return to his tunnel—the spirits under the mountains were calling to him—but he was sent to a private asylum for the insane, at Woodbridge, California, and in a year or two died there—the spirits, to the last, lingering about him and heaping on him reproaches for having left the golden mountains and silver caverns they had pointed out to him."



IN THE DEPTHS

By DALE COLLINS

Author of "On Allah's Sea" and "The Rat-Trap"

THE barroom of the Crossed Anchors Inn was brown and dark and snug. It was scented with the sea and with the reminiscence of tar, salt and oilskins, for its frequenters were sailormen and folk of the quays.

Sam Poole, the diver, found it very pleasant in there alone with Elsie. He basked in her smile. Elsie—designed on flowing curves, golden-haired, red-lipped, white-armed—might have seemed like any other bar-girl to more sophisticated eyes, but the patrons of the Crossed Anchors were simple souls who did not inquire whence came the gold of her hair, or the scarlet of her lips, and to whom her favor was a precious gift. She was as queenly, as desirable as Sheba in that snug little bar.

"It must be fine to go down into the sea," she said, conveying her admiration by a flirtatious glance at the short, sallow man.

The salvage tug had brought new interest to the sleepy port, and Elsie was sharing in the thrill by the conquest of its crew.

Poole sighed, as a man who is fatigued.

"It's a hard life, —— hard," he answered, fidgetting with his glass.

He admired the lady immensely, but she awed him, since, though ever susceptible to feminine charms, he was not a successful lover. They thought him a funny little man. Still, Elsie was being very gracious and he was encouraged. Like most men of the sea he was lonely, and in that hour he felt the need of sympathy.

For ten days he had been probing the secrets of the sea where, at a depth of twenty-six fathoms, the *Randiva* lay all twisted and broken with the waters swiftly weaving shrouds about her. And ten days of immersion at that depth among the dead men had frayed his nerves, though he was not aware of the fact. He only knew that he was tired and moody, and that his head hurt.

But ere he could approach any closer to the heart of this splendid creature, the door swung open and Mat Murphy came in, blustering, tremendous, dwarfing all things with his suggestion of wide oceans running to the sky's rim. He was red-headed, broad-shouldered, big-boned, with the manners of a cheerful bear and a boy's laugh. Women liked him.

With this man Poole had spent the long hours on the sea's bed, but they exchanged no word of greeting since there was a feud between them—a long and bitter feud. They worked well enough together, because in their diving suits they ceased to be men—they became grotesque monsters—and with this transformation their thoughts changed, also. But this repression of antagonism made them the more bitter when they returned to the world again, and the flame the waters had quenched blazed the more fiercely.

With the entrance of his fellow the pain in Poole's head increased.

"Good-night, Elsie, m'dear," boomed the newcomer. "Here, and tell me you love me as much as ever!"

The girl tossed her head and bridled, but she was flattered and hastened to obey, leaving the mild and dull Sam Poole to drink his beer alone. This was a sad business in the mood he was in. His thoughts were dark companions.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Murphy, boisterously amorous, leaning across the bar and holding Elsie's hands. This sight filled him with bitterness. He had noboby's hands to hold: Murphy had robbed him as usual.

Thus it had always been since the day five years before when they had started to work together, and Murphy had promptly stolen away the heart of Dot Henderson, the little stewardess, as only he could. It didn't matter much—Dot was almost forgotten now—but there had been so many repetitions of that theft in so many ways: always Murphy, the big man, robbing him—poor little Poole. It wasn't fair. He went through a long list of wrongs which rankled between them and kept the old wound open. And his head hurt.

"I'll have another beer, miss," he said.

Reluctantly she left the fascinating Murphy. In a futile effort to turn the tide of defeat little Poole put out an appealing hand.

"I was saying—" he began, but she tossed her head again.

"Can't wait, Sammy," she said.

Poole frowned and his lips worked. She couldn't wait because she wanted to talk to Murphy. Curse Murphy—the hulking swine. He spat at Murphy's shadow and longed to pick a fight, to get into holds, but that was no use since he knew by experience Murphy was the better man in a tussle.

The barroom of the Crossed Anchors was the only decent spot in port, but Mat Murphy had made it hateful. He slouched out into the night. Another victory had been won by the big man in their five years feud, and the head-pain gnawed more sharply.

A gust of wind and a flurry of rain increased his discomfort.

MORNING showed a sky washed clean of clouds, and the tug, squat and black, sat upon a calm sea above the *Randiva's* grave.

The divers were nigh ready. As the last adjustments were made to their suits they faced each other, but although there was hate between them their feelings were obscured by their suits which gave them an appearance unnatural and evil, making them into creatures of the sea untouched by the common emotions of mankind. It was as if their clumsy bodies dwarfed their heads so completely, that any expression on their faces could not matter.

But the deck-hand who brought Poole's helmet chanced to glance at him and read a hint of strange things in his eyes.

"What's matter, Sam?" he asked. "Feeling bad?"

"I'm all right," Poole answered, and his tone was peeved though dull. "Maybe a bit tired. I'm all right!"

But he knew he wasn't. He was prey to a troubled intensity of emotion, which he could not analyze. He might have blamed the sea, but Murphy there before him, strong and laughing, hateful and arrogant, was a more concrete thing. The big man was the cause of all his misery, Poole felt, and had shattered his nerve and given him this numb headache.

And Murphy kept bragging about his conquest of Elsie, while the crew laughed.

"Any one'd think you was just goin' down for the first time Sam, and wanted your mammy!" said the hand, looking curiously at the diver's drawn face.

Poole shook his head, but the words made him uncomfortable. He did feel just like that—good Lord, he did! He felt as if he'd never been down before, and yet he'd been diving longer than most. All the fault of that blasted Murphy—curse him!—sitting there like that and making a man cold and hot by turns with anger, and taking his mind off his job so that a silly hand could laugh at him.

The helmet descended on his shoulders and clamped home. Simultaneously Murphy, also, ceased to be a man and for a second they stood looking at each other through the tiny open windows before their faces. Then laboriously and heavily, like mechanical giants with weak, ill-oiled springs, they shuffled to the rail.

With surprize Poole discovered that, even as a novice, he was conscious of the great weight upon him. Never been down before——!

He climbed over on to the ladder and mechanically rested his great head on the topmost rung—looking like a monster, mourning because he had been ordered down into the depths again—while they adjusted his back-weight. They closed the glass upon him. The world ceased to be.

Odd— Odd——

Through the years he'd grown accustomed to the one hundred and eighty pounds he carried, but now he had that forgotten sensation of being a man of lead. This was all the doing of that swine Murphy. In his helmet he was shut-off and isolated, as if a tiny world had been built about him. The only sound was the wheezy cough of the pump on the tug's deck forcing the air to him. He shouldn't have been noticing these trifles—it was as if he'd never been down before. Cough went the pump, and cough—steady, persistent as the beating of a pulse.

They tapped upon his helmet. Well, it was time to start.

He descended the ladder and the mighty sea lifted the burden from him so that he seemed light as air. The waters closed over his head.

His bare hands found the shot-line which ran down straight as a plummet before him. The out let valve in his helmet bubbled and wheezed carrying off the waste air. He checked it for a space of seconds. The chain of bubbles rising above him ceased, that the watchers might see there was no fault in his armor. Then he rose to the surface and lifted his hand as a signal that all was well.

Through the streaming front-glass he had a vague impression of Murphy's hand upraised in the same way above the sea's blue plain. Normally the sight should not have disturbed him, for Murphy had ceased to be a man, but upon that morning everything was different; the hand he saw upflung was a man's hand and not a diver's —it had patted Elsie's last night, had balked and foiled him in a thousand ways. He hated it.

They lowered him down. The tug became a black shadow on the roof of the sea-world, and he descended into the depths, swallowing steadily to relieve the pressure on his ears and feeling the terrible mass of the ocean pressing upon his legs. The light dwindled. The shot-rope was as a ladder along which he went from the sunshine into the shadows of cold and eternal night. The pump beneath the blue sky wheezed and coughed; the valve gurgled.

"——," he said, "this is a rotten job, sure enough!" And then, as if in comment on another's remark: "A man'd think you'd never been down before. But it's all the fault of that swine Murphy. Why can't he leave you alone, always worrying you and picking at you!"

His voice rang strangely in his little world. Above him the bubbles danced up, eager to escape from the sea which had grown clouded as if the long hair of mermaids trailed in it, as if the downward drifting dust of dead men and dead ships wove into a gray fog.

The pain in Sam Poole's head grew sharper. He felt restless and had lost his calm acceptance of the facts of his lot. He wanted to get down and get it over and get up again.

A dim black mass took shape beside him. This was the funnel—more guessed than seen. Not far now to where she lay, chilled and somber, a dead ship in the deeps of death, the slime and the sand closing in to wrap her in oblivion. The sea had embraced her tightly, even in the short weeks she had lain there.

Stumbling and slipping Sam Poole came to rest on her upper deck and clung to a stanchion. His surroundings were familiar, but he had not seen them before as holding a misty horror which set his hands a-tremble.

"Don't be a —— fool!" he rebuked himself, and gave a single jerk upon his breast-line which told those above that he had reached the bottom.

Cautiously he took a step backward, for that is the easiest way to walk in lead boots with a water pressure of forty-eight pounds to the square inch. Arranging air-pipe and breast-line he fell upon his stomach and crawled slowly along the slimy deck toward their rendezvous. His hands fumbled in ooze, but that did not trouble him and neither did the eel-like progress disturb him. But he was not happy or at ease.

Abruptly the shadow of Mat Murphy rose before him. He was standing upright and Poole followed his example, so that two clumsy, goggling creatures peered into each other's faces, denizens of a world where men might not enter, but in which they masqueraded as citizens because they were men no longer.

The water magnified and blurred their outlines, so that Poole saw his enemy as a thing with a hateful, inflated head—suggestive of pride by its very dimensions

This trick the sea played was quite familiar to him, and yet it seemed to strip Murphy's soul and express him as he was. Thinking thus of the man in the monster, for the first time he found that the waters had not chilled his wrath.

The vast, round head swung closer to him, from miles away it appeared, although there was not more than two feet between them. As it approached it grew more and more inflated until it blotted out all things else and then, with a rattle, it rested against his helmet. The voice of his enemy, muffled and water-sodden, vibrated vaguely through the metal.

"What the ——'s the matter? Can't you get a move on, —— you, be all day——!"

They stood for a second like kissing lovers of the slimy depths.

"Saloon door!"

Murphy led the way on hands and knees, and Poole followed with his hate stronger than ever. That was just the way of it all the time: bullying, swearing, trampling on a man, never letting-up on him. He was a swine, that Murphy.

As they moved the disturbed slime darkened the night. The way was not easy, for the top-hamper had fallen in a welter of ropes and spars, and over this they had to pick a path with every movement strangled by the weight of waters and their eyes blind.

Without warning Poole discovered that something had happened to Murphy, for he was standing bolt upright and very still, like a statue, like a dead man. Surprized he fumbled his way up the still figure, and there were fiends whispering to him in tune with the beat of the pump.

Helmet to helmet he shouted—

"What's up?"

"Line's caught, and now m'feet. I stood up to clear the lines and a spar shifted. I can't go neither way now. Get me out, for God's sake!"

The fear which came so swiftly at the thought of being trapped down in that foreign world was in Murphy's voice. Poole recognized that, and he also recognized that the imps in his helmet were doing a dance of malicious glee and singing joyously that Fate had delivered his enemy into his hands. Switching on his light, which, as a novelty, worked, he made an inspection. The trap was complete. The line and pipe had jammed in a hook and had knotted there, so that although air came through to Murphy he could not communicate with the tug above nor could he free himself. The spar held him tightly near the knees, his heavy boots beneath it.

Seeing these things, Sam Poole smiled.

He found his way back to Murphy.

"You're caught," he said, and chuckled.

His tone, his manner, made his meaning clear, and flogged by the whips of terror Murphy gripped him and held him strongly.

"You get me out lively. Don't stand there gaping. Free those lines, and then I can get at this spar. I'll break every bone in your body when I get you!"

But Poole was not impressed by this. His wrath quickened. Even now when the big man was a helpless prisoner facing a terrible death he was trying to bluff him, trying to terrify him, trying to put him in wrong. He wouldn't stand that —— he wouldn't! He'd got Murphy at last, and the moment for the settling of all scores had come.

Helmet kissing helmet he spat at him:

"You! You! I've got you now! I've been waiting long enough for this. I've got you now, and there's no more having everything your own way for you!"

"Don't you try that! I'll——"

He broke into windy curses and threats, but Sam Poole smiled happily—hearing him through the coughs of the pump. The sea had delivered his enemy to him, and he was crazy.

"Don't you try putting the dirt in on me. You crawling insec' to think you can carry on dry-land fights down here! You rotten dog to fight when we're diving!"

But his plea did not impress Sam Poole. Deafened by the fiends' songs, he could not be stirred by pity or shame.

"What about it now, eh?" he asked. "What about Elsie now? What about everything, eh?"

Murphy still clung to him.

"You *can't* put the dirt in on me now, Sam—not when we're diving!"

The metal cut the incredulous note of horror from that cry, leaving it thin and hollow, and Poole's ears heard it as a coward's whine craving for friendship when it was too late. The lamp clad them in clouded radiance. The water pressed heavily upon them like the hand of Fate.

WITH an effort Poole wrenched himself from that embrace. He had no plan in his mind and knew not what he would do. As he reeled back he saw Murphy's hand snatch at his line, and for a breath feared that he might grasp it and give the signal which would send Poole rushing to the surface, but the hated hand missed its objective. Murphy had drawn his knife, too, but he could do no mischief with that.

Down there in that foreign element all this passed with deliberation, like a slow-motion film, and slowly and heavily Poole staggered back having missed his footing. They were still upon the upper deck, and as he fell his shoulder came against a cabin door. Beneath the impact the door—shattered and wracked like all else on the *Randiva*—slowly swung open.

Poole went back over the step, unable to check himself, and sprawled out on the floor with his light streaming up into the dark place.

The small cabin should have been undisturbed until Judgment Day, and Sam Poole brought with him, in addition to his feeble light, troubling currents of water.

There was one who slept in that cold cabin after the brief agonies of death—the poor drowned stewardess of the *Randiva*. She stirred wearily at this intrusion, and was picked up by the new streams of water, so that she swept out upright, as if she walked. She was clad in her nightgown, and her hair streamed wild. Her arms were held out limply as if in tired greeting; she had all the seeming of resurrection.

And the drowned girl was Dot Henderson of long ago.

Sam Poole struggled on the floor, and she walked over him, her feet almost brushing his chest. The water swirled and lapped upon his bare hands, and seemed to enter icily into his blood, freezing his life out. He had seen her face—white and weary, aghast at the coming of death—and he was in the grip of terror such as few men experience.

He had thought they were all alone down on the bed of the sea and out of the past had come Dot Henderson with horror on her features for the thing he did. His shocked brain did not consider the manner of her presence there, but he was stunned into realization of the madness that had been upon him. Shouting aloud, though none could hear, he flung himself out on to the deck, and in an agony of repentance heaved upon the spar. Murphy, who had seen no more than a floating corpse, which was no novelty, heaved also. The spar moved. They strove again. It rolled away.

That done he could not linger there. Murphy could free his lines himself. He had done all he could, he wanted to get up away from these noisome deeps where murder had been in him and a ghost had come out of the past to rebuke him. He gave four tugs, but not upon his line, for that would have meant an ascent lasting four hours to allow the pressure to be lifted gradually. He tugged upon the air-pipe which told the hands above that he was to be hauled up regardless of everything, because he was in mortal peril.

He closed the valve. His suit filled with air so that his head drummed and throbbed; he grew buoyant and then he was rising swiftly. They were hauling above, and he was rushing through the water. His ears were bursting; the sense went out of him. As the pressure grew less his speed increased, until, abruptly, the sea flung him out into the sunshine. He floated spread-eagled upon its surface like a ghastly corpse bloated out of all human semblance.

They lifted him in-board and unscrewed his helmet, but Sam Poole could not tell them what the trouble was. He had fainted, and his face showed wan and drawn beneath his red stocking-cap.

"Nerves gone," said the skipper, a stolid and calm man who knew the secrets of the men who had read the secrets of the sea.

A jerk upon Murphy's line was answered by a single jerk, for that good diver—comprehending why Poole had fled away—was going on with his duty. But they hauled him up also, for his comrade's life was at stake.

"What happened?" asked the skipper briefly, when Murphy was aboard with his helmet off.

The big man opened his mouth to speak. On his tongue were the words which would have branded Sam Poole as a potential murderer. But even as he did so he looked at the small man, and the sight of him stricken with such anguish silenced his tongue. Mat Murphy was a big man in more senses than one.

"Nerves," he jerked out. "Corpses!"

Poole was recovering, his eyes opened and he stared about him, wildly and with strange flickering glances. The skipper took his chin in a strong hand and looked down into his eyes, exerting discipline upon him, helping him to mastery of wits.

For there was hell and torment in front of Poole. He had to go down again into the depths and come up again, slowly, laboriously, through long and madness-haunted hours. At twenty-six fathoms the nitrogen in the air had gone into solution in his blood. With the pressure removed abruptly his blood would boil, and Caisson disease would kill him or maim him for life.

"Listen, Poole," said the skipper, "you'll be dead in half an hour unless you go down again. So down you must go!"

"I won't!" moaned the diver, and swore in a manner awful to hear.

"You will!" said the skipper. He gave a sign to the men. Ruthlessly they clamped the helmet on—this was bad luck for Sam, they admitted, but there was nothing else for it—and though he beat at them feebly they bore him to the side. Whatever sins Sam Poole had planned at the prompting of his devils were paid for in the hell of those moments. They bore him to the side; they put him over into the sea; with him was Mat Murphy, whom he had thought to kill.

His fevered brain was tortured by the refinement of this cruelty. As he became aware of the sea closing over him he was filled with a grim fatalism, with the calmness of despair. Instinct drove his fingers to control the air-pressure. He would go down into the depths as was written and there Murphy would gain his final victory. He could struggle no more; he could fight no more. Murphy was too strong and he had won.

Down, down, down he went to where Dot Henderson waited and where his foe would triumph.

He longed to close the valve and blow himself to the surface, but in his weakened state habit was stronger than fear. He only had to let the air out of his suit to end everything, for the pressure would have driven him up into his helmet like potted meat, but he did not do so because it was contrary to all that which had been engrained in him by long training. The doom Mat Murphy devised for him was inevitable, unescapable and he had no strength to struggle against it. Hand under hand he went down into the waters of death.

Though he saw him not he was conscious of Murphy in close attendance, and he knew that his enemy had won, finally and forever. As his feet touched the slimy deck of the *Randiva* Murphy took shape before him, vast and terrible and powerful. Sam Poole knew that the end had come, and he did not have the spirit to try and avert it nor the interest to wonder to what fate he had been condemned. He put up his hands—and they were a-shiver—in a gesture of surrender which was spontaneously natural.

"You've won—you swine!" he confessed.

And Murphy's great head bulged upon his.

"Feeling all right?" asked Murphy, the words sounding mocking and muffled.

"—— you, do me in—don't mess about—do me in!" cried Poole with the abandon of the mad.

"Me? I don't bear you no grudge—you're dippy!"

As Murphy said these words he touched the hands of his defeated foe, as if content with his victory he did not wish to humiliate the conquered. Dimly and vaguely Sam Poole sensed that, indeed, Murphy was winning even if he did not make any attack—that he was gaining the greatest victory of all in forgiving the man who had thought to kill him shamefully upon the sea's bed. He struggled against this uncomprehended emotion.

"But I'd have murdered you if it hadn't been for Dot!"

In this the other read the ravings of delirium.

"Shut up, and watch yourself!" he snapped.

Every pulse in Sam Poole's body was throbbing madly and every nerve was at tension. What did it mean—this pose of Murphy's? What did it mean—this gnawing sense of humiliation which possessed him? He could not answer either question, being a simple diver. He had no key to the cipher of the human heart. Incredulous he goggled at the shadow before him, waiting for attack, doubting his honesty, shivering with dread, yet haunted all the time by the knowledge that if Murphy really intended to let him go he was the better man, finally and forever, and more surely than if he had killed him.

"Come on," Murphy ordered. "Pull your socks up!"

They were ascending; resurrection had begun. With mad dignity, and as preposterous caricatures of men, they began to climb back to the world again. For four hours they were close together in the midst of the sea, halting at a dozen depths, wearied, beaten out, but always Murphy, the victor, drove Poole on to exercise in the ludicrous fashion which was necessary. And Poole was humble and numb and docile, like a little child. He had lost all reckoning of time, but only knew that there would be no end to this incessant strain, this battle between fear and hope, this magnificent triumph of Mat Murphy's. At times he fancied that he had died and that this was hell.

But, after the last and longest of the halts, the stars were above them of a sudden, and stolid men had lifted them aboard the tug. Something snapped in Sam Poole's head then. The face of the waters was bland and secretive. Wondering what tragic happenings had been enacted below, the crew questioned the big man, his fellow being beyond speech.

"Dunno," was the only reply they got. "We've been worked too —— hard. It's a rotten life, I tell you!"

Beyond that he would not go, for when a man had his suit on he ceased to be as those who dwell in the sunshine and was not their affair. They could not judge him; it was their business to supply him with air and obey his signals.

A fortnight later Mat Murphy entered the hospital ward.

In that neat place of whiteness and disinfectants he looked hulking, red and embarrassed. But the patient upon whom he called sat up in bed at Murphy's coming, and though there was no madness left in his eyes his manner suggested that a king had honored him with a visit.

Nothing of this was expressed in speech, however.

"Goo' day—how is it, Sam?"

"Goo' day—not so bad, Mat!"

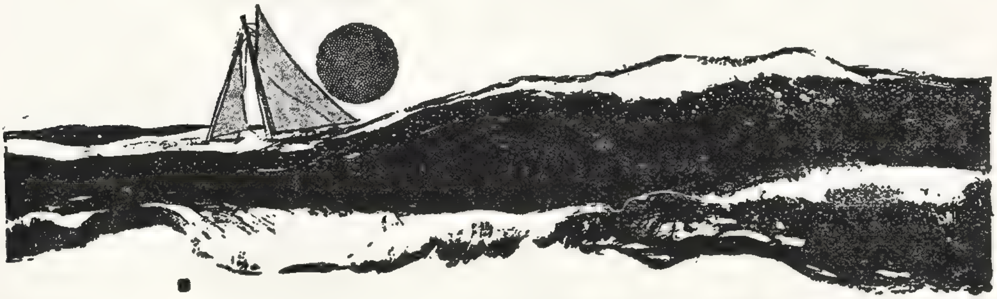
There was an awkward pause between the twain who had fought a feud through five years and a day that had been centuries long. In that orderly place of angelic nurses and flowers in vases their thoughts were as foreign to the surroundings as the thoughts of two fish would have been.

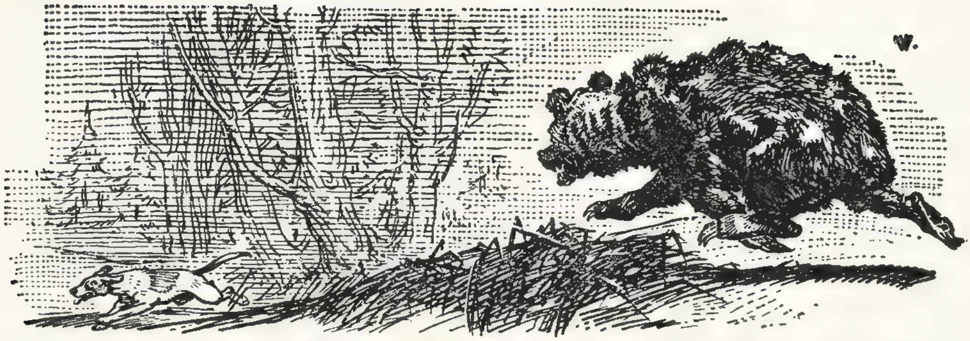
"Dot Henderson—she—" Poole began, but having gulped this out he paused for he was not eloquent, and he had so much to say that he knew not how to undertake the task.

Murphy, balanced clumsily on the edge of a small, white chair, nervously twirled his cap.

"Forget it!" he said, having no idea of what Poole meant, and then, hurriedly and yet casually: "Say, Sam, you know that girl in that bar—that Elsie? She run away with a drummer and all the cash from Saturday night. ——, and we was fighting over her. Better let the past be forgot, eh, Sam?"

He was a little out of breath after this effort in which so much more had been said than the mere words. They shook hands awkwardly; they left it at that.





THE GRUDGE HOUND

by S. OMAR BARKER

BARRY McNEIL stopped his horse at the edge of an open aspen park, and after a moment's hesitation, pulled his rifle from the scabbard and threw a cartridge into the barrel. For a moment he did not dismount. He had little heart for the job he was about to do.

"Here you, Mutt," he called, and a disreputable-looking brown dog trotted from behind his horse's heels and stood wagging his half-curly tail as he looked up expectantly. He was not much of a dog to look at. Somewhere in his many-blooded ancestry there had been a water-spaniel and that was the only strain that had left any peculiar outward indication of its existence. Little tufts of curly blackish hair were scattered all over his body and there were two of them on his tail, giving a grotesque, spotted appearance to the dirty brown that was his dominant color. There was a vague hint of the collie, too, about his nose.

You could see that he was but a youngster, yet he had little of that softness of hair or that lithe buoyancy of shank that marks youth in a dog. One long houndish-looking ear hung to the bottom of his jaw, but where the other should have been there was nothing but a hairy stub.

As he cocked his one good ear in response to the young ranchman's call the Mutt looked ludicrously lopsided and pitifully idiotic and worthless. And worthless he was. That was why McNeil was going to shoot him. Ever since the Mutt had followed the children home from the native Mexican village where they attended the district school a week before, McNeil had been trying to get rid of him. He had good Airedales of his own and this tail-wagging, gluttonous pest of a mongrel was not only useless, but he would spoil Pete and Fanny and Old Pup as well.

McNeil tried running him off with the other dogs, but he just lay helplessly over on his back and whined, and not even young Pete would condescend to bite such a groveling coward. He gave him to a Mexican down the cañon, but in a couple of days the Mutt came trotting back up the road with the children, who, as soon as they came in sight of their father feeding steers at the barn, began to scold him back.

The Mutt, who felt sure they didn't mean it after the way they had just been playing with him, took it all as a joke and responded by nipping their heels and finally ambling up to the kitchen door, where he flopped himself down with a contented sigh, perfectly at home and apparently glad to be there.

When he caught a chicken the next day and carried it proudly to the house, McNeil decided that there was nothing to do but kill the poor brute. He would not shoot him there near the house because of the children, and because his Airedales would see it and possibly become rifle-shy.

That same night the Mutt, ostracized by the serious minded Airedale hunters and the whole McNeil family as well, sought amusement of his own—and found it, pretending that a good Navajo saddle-blanket was a

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"The Grudge Hound," copyright, 1924, by S. Omar Barker.

rabbit or something of the sort until the blanket was in shreds and he was exhausted from his happy frolic. That was the last straw. When McNeil set out for the Upper Gallinas country the next day to take a look as his cattle on the range, he locked his Airedales up in the cellar and called the unsuspecting Mutt to come with him. Somewhere out in the woods he would be rid of him—the spang of a rifle, a bullet between the eyes and it would be all over.

McNeil swung off his horse and spoke to the Mutt, whom this day's abundance of kind words and the honor of following along into the woods had thoroughly delighted and convinced that he was now a very important animal.

"Never mind, old useless," said the man, "you'll never know what struck you. Go on, trot out there a little! You're too close. Go on, sic'em!"

The Mutt, feeling his new responsibility as the only dog in the party, trotted out along the slope a few yards looking for something to justify his master's "sic'em." As McNeil raised his rifle and swung its sights around to rest on the upraised brown head with its one long ear, there was a sudden bellowing off down the hill, and hearing it, the Mutt broke suddenly into a yelping run toward the noise, and McNeil did not shoot. He stopped the motion of his trigger-finger just in time to avoid making a wide miss.

The bellowing down the hill, where the grassy park merged again into aspen and fir, increased. Another raucous voice, that of a cow, added itself to the first bawling, which had been that of a bull. Mc Neil forgot the Mutt. He knew what that disturbance meant. The bellowing cattle were his, and their frightened, almost frantic, tone told him that they had suddenly come upon one of their kind dead or else wounded. It was their unmistakable "blood bellow."

While he rode rapidly down the steep slope it became a great clamor as others joined the first two. The sudden sharp barking of the Mutt silenced them for a moment and when McNeil reached the spot the frightened, excited cattle were circling nervously about what remained of the carcass of a fine Hereford cow. Her entrails had been torn out, some of one hindquarter eaten, and the Mutt, growling between bites, was tearing off great chunks of the fresh red meat and swallowing them voraciously.

McNeil kicked the dog aside, hardly pausing or looking at him as he did so, and hurried to the dead cow's head. As he had expected, it was bent back under her shoulders, and when he yanked it out he could feel the looseness of a broken neck. The shreds that had been her ears, the scratches on her nose, her broken neck, told all too plainly the identity of her murderer —bear. Stooping, McNeil could make out the outline of great padded feet in the soft dirt. Finally he found a clear, unmarred track. It was more than a foot long and he could make out from the mark of blunt claws in the dirt at the front of the padded impress, that the huge animal must have been a grizzly-silvertip, as they called them in New Mexico.

A feeling of helpless rage came over the young cattle ranchman, and he swore bitterly as he sat down to map out a plan of procedure. His strong, tanned face drew down into despondent lines. Discouragement possessed him. He had bought his ranch and cattle with hard-earned savings only two years before. Then livestock prices had slumped. He could not sell even his fat steers except at a loss. There had been two hard Winters. The one just past had cost him many of his best cows, dying from exposure and lack of feed. Those that he had Wintered were almost like jointed sticks walking about, so poor and thin had they become. Now with the sprouting of May grass and weeds he had brought them hopefully to their Summer range, ending, he thought, his long period of losses.

And what was the result? Already one of his best cows—she would have had a fine calf at her side in another month—had been killed. The "sign" told him that this had not happened the night before. It had been two days at least, yet the killer had not returned since his first meal. That meant he had killed another—perhaps two —perhaps half a dozen, elsewhere. McNeil had not ridden the range since he had brought the cattle over more than a week before. If he had only known that this was going to happen——

As he got up and started to his horse he became aware that the Mutt was gnawing at the carcass again. The sight of the dirty, useless cur tearing out great mouthfuls of red meat irritated him intensely. He kicked the dog almost viciously and when he reached his horse, which had shied off a few steps, he took his rifle from the scabbard and turned around. He might as well kill that dog now, anyway.

But the Mutt, nursing the cramp McNeil's boot toe had given him in an overloaded stomach, had slipped out of sight down the hill. There was something more menacing about those two kicks he had just received than any other rough treatment he had ever known and he deemed himself safer out of sight.

McNEIL rode his range carefully that day, carefully and despondently, for he found four more carcasses like that of the fine Hereford cow. At one of these he glimpsed the Mutt slinking off into the brush, and for a moment he thought the movement was that of a bear, but there was not time enough to shoot whichever it was. When he rode home about two o'clock in the afternoon after his two bear-traps to set, he did not notice that the Mutt was following him stealthily, keeping always barely out of sight, or else stopping stone still whenever he thought he was seen.

On the return trip with two great-jawed, forty-pound steel traps on a pack-horse, McNeil took along his three Airedales. They were not experienced bear dogs, but he knew they had the stuff in them and it would be late in the evening—one of the bears might be back at the carcasses and give them a chance to stop him. The dogs, after their half-day's confinement, were wild with energy and enthusiasm and raced far ahead along the road.

Where the trail leaves the cañon road for the steep climb over Pinavete Ridge, they fell in behind the horses, and the Mutt, taking new courage from the confidence of the other dogs, joined them on the trail. They paid no more attention to him than if he had been there all the time, and even McNeil did not notice him until they were crossing the ridge and dropping down through the aspens toward one of the freshest killed carcasses.

"You —— Mutt!" he exclaimed, but made no move to take the rifle from its scabbard.

It would not do to shoot him now where the other dogs would see it. Beatty had ruined a good hunting-dog that way once. Funny how they would know that it was the shot that did it. But they would—no doubt of that. Besides, if they should jump a bear, the cur would be fool enough to run in and get killed, like as not, and save him that trouble.

Bear-trapping was not new to McNeil. He had caught ten in one Summer several years before over in the Jemez country, but never before had it been a battle to save his own stock. At each of two carcasses he built a little pole corral around the meat, leaving a narrow opening down-hill and placing the trap just inside of it, with the round pole-clog to which it was attached laid crosswise as a stepping foil for bruin.

Old Pup and Fanny caught a whiff of bear scent from the old sign, and ran growling and barking ferociously off through the trees, only to circle and return, discovering nothing fresh enough to follow. The Mutt watched them curiously, his head cocked sidewise and his good ear flapping in little jerks, his whole attitude one of innocent wonder as to what all the fuss was about. It was evident that the smell of bear meant nothing to him. The smell of that half-eaten carcass—that was different! He wagged his tail anxiously when McNeil moved the meat just before setting a trap. After the set was made he would have ventured into the pen, but Pete, the younger Airedale, started to try it first and the scolding he got so frightened the Mutt that he turned tail and fled to the security of the horse's heels.

It was deep twilight when McNeil mounted and turned back up the hill toward the trail. He was careful to call the dogs with him lest they should get to nosing around and get in one of the traps. At first the Mutt hesitated, his nose still thrilled by the smell of that fine meat. McNeil yelled at him——

"Come on here, you —— mongrel!"

His angry tone decided the Mutt. He started back toward the traps, and McNeil, knowing what would happen, was obliged to run back after him, calling to him wheedlingly:

"Here, old boy! Come on, Mutt! Good doggie!"

McNeil swore under his breath, but the Mutt heard only his pretended kindness. One word of it made him forget all about the inviting bait back there on the hillside. He took this to mean forgiveness, reconciliation. Rarely had he heard such friendly words, and he responded at once, running to McNeil and cutting all sorts of capers around him, whining his joyful appreciation. The young ranchman felt a pang of pity and patted his head.

"Poor old ——!" he said as he remounted and started homeward.

When Barry McNeil rode to the Upper Gallinas the next morning he found his first trap untouched. As he approached the second, Old Pup and Fanny growled ominously, and before he had come close enough to see that the trap and its clog had been dragged violently off down the hill, the two old Airedales broke and ran, followed presently by Pete, the youngster. The Mutt cocked his head on one side and looked after them disdainfully. What was all the fuss about? He looked up at McNeil and wagged an ingratiating, half-curly, brown-black tail, and when the man did not heed him but dismounted and hurried down the hill rifle in hand toward the barking dogs, the Mutt followed him precipitously.

In a little clump of Douglas firs of fence-post size they came upon violent action. The three dogs were baying and making vicious but only momentary snaps at a great shaggy brown bear, held prisoner by one front foot. The clog of the trap was caught between the close-growing tree-trunks, but the big fellow seemed little hampered by this situation. He struck fiercely with his free fore-paw and bawled and popped his great teeth at his nimble tormentors. The young Airedale found a safe but precarious hold on the bear's two-inch tail. Fanny nipped at his flanks and Pup alternately sank his teeth into a hind leg and slashed at the swinging head, which he never seemed to touch.

The Mutt bristled a little and then barked, a little nervously but wagging his tail as if wondering whether to take the affair as a joke or seriously. Finally, deciding it must be only play, he trotted, with funny little *woof-woofs*, right up to the enraged bear's head. The huge jaws reached for him and caught, not his head, but his one good ear. The Mutt jerked back with a wild howl of pain and surprize. Old Pup heard him, turned loose his mouthful of hind-quarter hide and hair, and leaped straight for a hold on the big animal's jaw. His teeth caught just below the left eye and there he hung, tugging with all his small might. The bear bawled out his pain and astonishment, but in another second swung open his great jaws and crushed them together on Old Pup's neck. And in the second that the game old dog's body went limp McNeil's rifle cracked and the bear tumbled in a gigantic, quivering heap.

The Mutt, seeming suddenly to resent the painful shredding of his ear, silently seized one of the big kicking hind paws and swung on to it like a bull-dog, while Pete and Fanny took quick advantage of their enemy's sudden collapse to leap for his shaggy throat. Old Pup did not move. The bear's heavy jaws had released him, but his own teeth still clung in their skin hold on the side of the bear's head.

McNeil gently forced open the clenched jaws and then felt his neck. It was as limp and crushed as if it had been hammered on an anvil, and the old dog was dead. There were tears in the young ranchman's eyes as he tenderly took up the body of his old companion of the woods and carried it a few steps away to a clump of scrub-oak. When he came back to the dead bear he found the Mutt still tugging and chewing on a now unresisting hind foot. McNeil had seen how Old Pup was killed, and though he knew better than to attribute responsibility to a dumb animal, he felt a deep resentment when he saw the Mutt, practically uninjured, fighting and tugging so bravely now that there was no danger. Without stopping to think what he was doing he reached out his boot and kicked him as hard as he could.

There was more than physical pain in the Mutt's howl as he turned loose his hold and scrambled precipitately off into the brush out of sight. In it there was a tone of surprized questioning. What was the matter? Didn't the man want him to fight that bear? Fanny and Pete were still worrying at its throat and he hadn't kicked them. That kick was a hard one, too. Every time he kicked you it was a little harder than the last time. The Mutt felt a sudden twinge in his bleeding ear-flap and whimpered. He wondered if the man knew how badly he felt. He cocked his head on one side and listened, in the hope that he might hear some of the same kind words that had called him back the night before. But he could hear nothing, and whimpering with pain he put his tail between his legs, crept off farther down the hill and curled up miserably in the brush.

Barry McNeil skinned the bear, reflected bitterly that this was a cinnamon, not the grizzly that had been killing his cattle, reset his traps and rode home. The children cried a little when he told them that Old Pup was dead, and then, because their mother had told them that daddy was going to have to shoot the Mutt, they noticed that he too was missing and cried a little more, but did not ask any questions.

McNEIL went about his work in a blue mood the rest of the day. He had worked hard to build up a good bunch of Herefords, and bad luck had faced him at every turn. His Winter losses had eaten up the hope of profit and now the grizzlies were even destroying the herd. He had tried trapping because it was the surest way in this dry broken country. Dogs—unless he had half a dozen good ones—could do little. Now he had but two left anyway, and one of them only a pup. He knew that the killing of cattle would not stop until he had either killed the big silver-tip or driven him out of the country. Maybe there were two of them—he had seen but one track, but then here was the brown bear he had caught—he hadn't seen its track either. Yes, the killing would go on. He did not know that at that very moment the Mutt was beginning to gnaw on the carcass of another animal killed only the night before—the same night he caught the brown bear—and that it was the carcass of his best registered yearling bull. Yet had he known, he could hardly have been more discouraged than he was.

A gust of wind had driven the odor of fresh blood up the hill to where the Mutt lay in the brush, and, glutton that he was, he had sneaked down to it, yelping shrilly every now and then as he caught his lacerated ear on the crooked-limbed oak underbrush. As he went he recognized a slight odor like that of the bear that had ripped his ear, mingled with the inviting smell of fresh beef, and he bristled a little but did not turn back.

Hardly had he torn off a single bite from the carcass, however, when his nose told him that the scent was becoming stronger and fresher. The bear had made his kill in a little hollow free of brush, but flanked on all sides by stands of dense young fir and greening scrub-oak and aspen. The Mutt heard the swish of movement in green brush and looked up to see a great grayish grizzly standing not thirty feet away, looking at him questioningly, albeit with some apparent hostility. The Mutt, remembering his torn ear and at the same time the speedy victory he and the other dogs had gained when that other bear had attacked him, bristled bravely and growled. Then he took another bite of meat, as if in defiance of interference from the bear or anybody else.

The grizzly, a little puzzled, raised himself slightly on his hind legs and looked. Then dropping on all fours again and rumbling a sort of booming growl deep in his throat, he came ambling swiftly down into the hollow and up to the carcass. The Mutt barked nervously and stood his ground until the big animal swung out with a broad fore-paw at him. He dodged the blow and circled his attacker some ten feet away. The grizzly did not follow him, but instead seemed to take it for granted that the little poacher, whatever he was, had been disposed of, and started nosing at the dead animal. But he did not reckon with the Mutt's brief but very recent and well-remembered bear experience. Even the little black patches of curly hair stood up on the Mutt.

So this big old butt-in was going to drive him away from his meat, was he? He darted suddenly and silently at the bear's hind quarters, snapping viciously where the black heel showed right at the ground. His first snap hardly more than tickled the grizzly's foot, but it surprized and angered him, and he turned and charged at his assailant. The dog, in turn, had not expected such a sudden response, and only by the merest fraction of an inch did he escape a fore-paw blow that would have broken half his bones. But he did escape, and when he ran off a little distance the grizzly did not follow him but returned to his meat, nuzzling it around a great deal but making no pretense of eating.

The Mutt watched him for a few minutes and then slipped up to him again, nipping a little swifter and harder this time. The grizzly bawled in anger, but when he whirled around, the dog was already out of reach and scurrying for the thicket. With surprizing speed for his enormous bulk the old bear followed him, but the Mutt was thoroughly frightened now and in the thicket he easily kept out of reach, yelping in pain every now and then as his bleeding ear caught on some brushy protrusion. For almost a quarter of a mile the grizzly kept up the chase in a sort of desultory fashion, finally stopping to root for flag-roots in the mud of a little spring.

When the Mutt found he was no longer pursued he stopped and tried frantically to reach his wounded ear with his soothing tongue. Perhaps it was exasperation at his failure to reach it that recalled to him the fact that a bear—one of those animals like that one back there in the little cañon—had been the cause of all this grief. At any rate something caused him to bristle suddenly and then to sneak crouchingly back up the hill and across a little ridge to where the grizzly had temporarily turned pig and was grunting and rooting in the mud. The Mutt employed very little strategy. Trusting to his enemy's preoccupation he made one sudden dash at him, seizing a hind leg, biting it sharply and releasing it all in a flash.

Again the grizzly rushed at him, and this time the claws of that powerful swinging paw caught the Mutt across the hip and sent him rolling down the hill faster, if anything, than he had been running. He was on his feet in the tenth of a second and out of reach. There was a stinging pain in his hip and a growing, burning hatred in his heart. He ran as long as he could see or hear the grizzly following him, and then stopped and licked his new hurt. In half an hour his grudge got the better of him. He back-trailed and tackled the big fellow again—this time as he lay dozing under a dark overhanging rock.

And so this strange warfare kept up at intervals of fifteen minutes to an hour all day long. There was no barking, no baying, but with the same persistent stubbornness that had brought him back to McNeil's home again and again, he now kept returning to annoy the grizzly.

A little before dark the big bear set out in a somewhat shambling but quite speedy amble that soon brought him to a little point of rock where he could overlook a long slope of aspen interspersed with grass parks. Cautiously and at a safe distance the Mutt followed. There were groups of dark dots on little flats here and there near the edges of the parks on the slopes below. The stir of night-air along the hill brought their scent—the smell of cattle—to the hog-like nostrils of the bear on the point above them. Silently he circled down the hill, stopping every moment or two to sniff the air and watch. As he came near, still out of sight, several cows got up from their beds restlessly. Two or three mothers bawled to their calves. Then suddenly the big grizzly ran out into one of the openings, passed the frightened cattle and disappeared in the aspen on the other side of the park. There he stopped dead still for a moment and looked back.

Some of the cattle were running off into the heavy timber, some of them, bawling in frightened tones, were clustered about a group of little calves. But there were some, isolated a little from the bunch, that simply stood with heads high in the air, frightened nostrils distended, looking, looking, trying in vain to see again the great gray death that had just passed among them.

Singling one of these from the bunch the grizzly stole cautiously as close to it as he could. Then with a great bawling snort he rushed out into the open between the frightened animal and the others. On a fair, straightaway field she might have outrun him, but stunned as she was with fright the cow ran in a broken zigzag course toward the bunch, quartering toward the grizzly, and in fifty yards of running he was alongside of her. As she swung her head sidewise toward him in an effort to fight him off, he raised suddenly to strike with a powerful front paw. He had killed many cattle before. He had become expert at it and there was deadly certainty in his every movement.

But at the very moment he started his death blow he felt a sharp momentary twinge of pain in the muscles just above his left hind-foot, and in the second that he paused the cow gained her length away from him. Without turning to see what had caused his pain the great bear growled in rage and sped after his fleeing prey. But the cow had outdistanced him and he did not catch her again. The whole herd, tails high and bawling in panic, were racing down the mountain side toward the cañon.

The grizzly stopped short when he saw he was outdistanced, and the Mutt, who had followed the entire run in the firm belief that he was chasing the big cheese out of the country, set his feet wide apart to stop himself, but nevertheless slid headlong into the bear's hind quarters, closed his teeth for a fraction of a second in the first flesh his mouth found, and then hurtled on down the hill without a scratch or blow from his formidable enemy. Nor did the Mutt pause to see whether or not he was being pursued. That sudden collision up there in the park and his own near-catastrophe brought him a sudden, awful realization of the vast bulk of the monster he had been chasing. He fled in a wild panic, the grizzy rumbling after him.

There is a popular fallacy to the effect that a bear is slow moving and clumsy. If the Mutt had ever heard or believed it, he got it chased out of him that night on the timbered slope of the Upper Gallinas. The momentum of his first great fright at the collision would have kept him going until he reached the farm settlements across in the next cañon if the angered bear had only let him go. But when the Mutt found himself closely pursued and half-winded he took to dodging into dense thickets of young firs, tearing into tangles of scrub-oak and buck-brush regardless of the pain in his torn ear. His pursuer was thoroughly aroused and followed him persistently, almost catching him a dozen times, and as he dodged and doubled, yelping and whining every now and then, the dog's fright slowly gave place to a bitter, deep-set anger and he began to circle back in an effort to get behind his pursuer, snarling and growling, but always keeping on the move as he did so.

Once, circling down the hill he suddenly found himself at the edge of a sharp, jutting limestone cliff, ten or twelve feet of sheer drop to the leafy mulch of an aspen grove below. He turned up the hill to face the great avenging mass of death that came rushing toward him. The Mutt snarled and stood his ground at first, but as the grizzly came nearer and nearer he backed to the very edge of the cliff, popping his teeth with as great a show of ferocity as he could muster.

When the grizzly came within reach and swung at him as swiftly and apparently as casually as an expert boxer at a sparring partner, his great paw fanned nothing but thin air, for the Mutt dodged, and dodging lost his footing and tumbled to the slope below. When the grizzly came to the edge of the cliff and looked down he could see no movement. The little pest that had spoiled his night's hunting lay still except for the slight movement of his head that accompanied a pitiful whimper. The bear stood for a moment swinging his great head from side to side, and then, sniffing the air around toward the west, turned and ambled off at an east slant down the slope toward Deer Springs.

McNEIL did not sleep soundly that night. It was two in the morning when he woke his wife and told her he had decided to ride back over the mountain to his cattle and watch for the bear as daylight came on, and in a few minutes he had saddled Quito and was on his way. In the hope of hiding among the cattle and watching for the bear or of slipping up on him at his kill, McNeil left Pete and Fanny at home lest they should bark and thus raise the alarm or bring about the same result by frightening the cattle. Riding silently down the Deer Springs trail he heard the nervous bawling of disturbed cattle, and dismounting he walked as quietly as he could to the jutting of the limestone ledge that overlooks the open grass *cañada* just above the springs. It was still dark in the timber, but McNeil knew that mountain foot by foot and in a very few minutes he reached his objective and squatted at the cliff's edge to watch. It was lighter here and in the open park below he could see a dozen head of cattle moving nervously about. One or two were standing with heads high and looking toward the east side of the *cañada,* with now and then a little snort of fear and a shifting of position. The young ranchman saw that this was not his main bunch, and that some of these were not his own, but he was glad he had heard them bawling and had come here, for he felt sure that something either had happened or was about to.

He had not long to wait. A great hulk of dark shadow suddenly catapulted out of the aspen to the east and cut in between one of the frightened cows and the eight or ten others bunched at the lower edge of the clearing. She bawled and turned wildly down the hill, quartering toward her pursuer, and before McNeil could even raise his rifle the grizzly had caught up with her. He tried to shoot, but the dusk of early morning blurred his sights and he could not tell whether he had them on the bear or the cow or just upon some dark clump of willows. As he lowered his gun to look again he saw the two slow up and heard the cow bawl in pain.

Then he suddenly became aware of a smaller dark object racing madly but with a queer jerky, limpy motion toward the struggle. In the swiftly growing light he could see that this object went directly to the grizzly's heels, and then to his surprize the cow broke loose from the mêlée and ran, tail in the air and shaking her head, down the hill into the aspen thicket. At the same instant the bear bawled in anger and turned to destroy the pest that nipped so sharply at his now sore hind-legs.

The dozen seconds had seemed hours to McNeil, but the instant he saw his cow run free he raised his rifle, found the dark moving object that was the bear in his sights and fired.

The grizzly tumbled a dozen feet down the hill, and then got up and rushed madly back up the hill at the dog that had been the cause of his undoing. McNeil fired again and the bear stopped for a second and then caught the impact of the little fury that hurtled down the hill toward him with a fair swing of a front paw. It sent the Mutt tumbling and yelping down the slope. But when McNeil shot again it was not half a second until the dog, dragging his hind-quarters, had clenched his teeth into a kicking hind-foot of the great bear as he rolled in grotesque convulsions down the hill.

It took McNeil almost five minutes to find a way down from the cliff, and when he reached the bear he found the big fellow stone-dead, but there, lying sprawled across him was the Mutt, a strange, twisted body, gnawing and growling and tugging at one of the great paddel feet, now almost a pulp from the chewing of his teeth.

McNeil blinked his eyes in astonishment, and then as he saw the shapeless, broken posture of the dog's hind-quarters, he felt a lump come in his throat, for he was a lover of brave dogs.

He stooped and patted the brown head, now streaked with blood.

"Good old dog!" he said, and the Mutt stopped chewing the dead foot a moment to make a feeble movement with his tail.

As gently as he could McNeil lifted him and carried him to a flat patch of grass above an old log. The dog whined and howled pitifully when he moved him, but lying down he essayed a feeble wagging response to the man's kind voice. McNeil examined his wounds. Both hind-legs were broken and he had been badly bitten and bruised through the back.

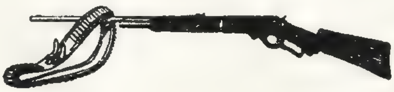
When he had bound the broken legs in temporary bandages made from the tail of his own shirt, McNeil set about skinning the grizzly, the Mutt watching him eagerly, whining now and then as if anxious to come and help in what seemed to him a final attack upon the big brute.

The sun was shining in the salmon-tinted hues of early morning as McNeil led the horse he had left up in the timber down to the opening above Deer Springs. He swung the bear-hide across the back of his saddle and tied it. Then with the Mutt, whimpering with the pain of movement, in his arms, he mounted and rode around the *cañada* toward the trail. With the easier going of the open trail McNeil shifted his burden carefully, so that the wounded dog's head was back over his arm and the injured hind-quarters across his thigh on the saddle. Thus shifted the Mutt suddenly thrust forth his scrawny neck and seized hold of the gray-grizzled bear-hide—all that was left of his old enemy—and growling viciously, began to shake it.

The young ranchman grinned in sympathetic understanding, and since he could not carry the dog in this position, reached back and pulled up a dangling, lacerated hind-foot and put it into the Mutt's mouth. The dog settled back in his arms, growled and set his teeth in the foot.

"It's yours, old boy," McNeil said gently. "Hang on to it all you please!"

And thus they rode back over Pinavete Ridge to the home ranch.



JACK

by Bill Adams

HE WASN'T much to look at, a queer little fellow
With windy blue eyes, and his beard stained yellow;
A quid in his cheeks, and a roll in his walkin',
A pair o' tarry breeks and a quaint way o' talkin',
Not much to look at,—p'raps like you and me,—
A quiet little party in from the sea.

He strolled about the shore a-lookin' at the sights,
Saw the leaves shakin', and thought o' starry nights
He'd stood alone a-steering, a wheel in his hands,
A quiet man unfearing on the road to foreign lands.
Born by a sea-port, a man from a slum,
Who sailed the stormy waters where big winds drum.

He wasn't much to look at,—p'raps like me and you,—
With sea-bag and sea-chest, just one of the crew.
He said he wouldn't leave her, an old ship sinkin',
Her gaping wounds to grieve her, and her torn chains clinkin';
A-whistlin' a ditty, a-sinkin' in the sea,
Where the ships sail pretty, the winds blow free.

So he stayed to ease her dying, the broken ship,
Her torn ensign flying; quiet was his grip;
Bright were his brave eyes while the old ship died,
And he steered her down to heaven 'neath the cold sea-tide:
Not much to look at,—a man like you and me,—
A quiet little party drowned in the sea.

THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD

by

CONROY KRODER

Author of "The Undesirable Svenson," "Trouble in Company D," etc.

THAT was really what ailed Baldwin—he was afraid. Try as he would, he could never forget that he was legally dead, not that an innocent man had been sentenced to life in San Quentin for murdering him. Particularly, he could not forget why he had connived at this, nor the disastrous consequences to him if he were forced to return to life.

That was what drove him to work and to drink and to other things. When he flayed the blacks—as he did—likely the release of his anger afforded him relief for a while. When he organized secret piratical expeditions upon other men's pearl beds, it also helped him to forget. Partially, that is. There were very few moments when the danger of discovery was off his mind.

Even on the morning following his best and most profitable exploit of all, it bothered him. Indeed, that morning it was worse than usual, perhaps because there were so many strange faces on Marawa Island. The wreck of the *Mosby* had brought him luck; it might also bring him disaster.

When he strolled into the barroom of Marawa Tavern, he flinched from the thought that even among those castaways from the wreck, there might have been some one who could recognize him. And he looked around anxiously for the one newcomer whom he had not yet seen, and whom he therefore dreaded seeing.

Not finding him, he had his drink and started toward the door. Just then, Maharg called out something to him, but Baldwin pretended not to hear. The youth Maharg was interesting as a drinking crony, but at present would be in the way. At present any one would be in the way, for it was nearing the time Baldwin had fixed to receive the report of his boss-boy Maiokah on the concealment of certain evidence.

Maiokah was to meet him on the jetty, so Baldwin sauntered down to the flour-white beach and waited, leaning on a rail.

It was so very quiet here that he relaxed and smiled a little—a secretive sort of smile that barely crinkled his smallish, handsome face. A careful, repressed, hardly apparent smile, not at all the sort you would expect from an avaricious man who had doubled his possessions overnight.

He had done that thing—and he had not been poor before. Everything he could see had already been his—the jetty, the launch that lay beside it, the two twelve-ton pearling-schooners, and the anchored store-ship with its confusion of shell, dead oysters and diving-gear on its deck. Ashore, the tavern belonged to him, the huddled native quarters, and the natives themselves in every sense that mattered. Everything was his but the water itself, just now dotted with translucent jelly-fish, and sprayed from time to time by a school of flying-fish steeplechasing from their enemies.

Four days before, however, that same peaceful looking water had been doing its best to maintain for Torres Straits its reputation as a graveyard of vessels. And every few minutes came a reminder of the big storm as a wave, rising mysteriously from the mirror-like sea, burst on the coral beach with a dull, drum-like sound.

About four hundred yards north of the jetty were other reminders—the tips of two masts projecting from the water. These belonged to the schooner *Mosby*, Melbourne bound from Thursday Island, but driven ashore by the hurricane and ripped fore and aft by coral reef.

Beaching had not been possible where she struck. Straight down into the water ran the side of the island; the reef which had knifed her ran straight down too, and the *Mosby* lay between in about six fathoms, not two hundred yards from shore. All but two of her crew had made the beach alive and were now at Marawa Tavern.

Two company divers were also there, sent out hastily from Thursday Island, for pearls to the value of ten thousand pounds had been part of the *Mosby's* cargo.

Careful as was his smile, Baldwin's trim, slight body thrilled from toe to crown as he thought of those pearls, and his slender fingers curled as if he were again weighing and estimating them. But when the *pad-padding* of Maiokah's bare feet sounded behind him, he turned with such nervous swiftness that Maiokah grinned abjectly and raised propitiating hands.

"Well?" queried Baldwin, sternly.

"The job—he is feenish."

"Tackle, pumps, line, everything. All gone, eh?"

"Yes, massa."

"Where've you put 'em?"

"I carry heem, as you say, 'way 'round to back of warehouse. Then I breeng heem in from behind."

"Sure no one saw you?"

"Yes, massa. I look. I listen. Eet be berry dark. Before de moon. Nobody see, for sure."

"You fix the underbrush. You fix the tracks."

"I do. After sun-up, I do eet. No one know we be there."

"All right. Now, remember, you tell, you die. Kimiachi die, too. If Kimiachi tell, he die. You, too. You no tell, you get two of the biggest pearls, and Kimiachi gets two, and you can both go back to Samarai and be black nabobs. You savvy, eh?"

"Yes, massa."

"You better. All right. Now get back to your work."

Baldwin watched Maiokah reach the shore and make his way to a point opposite the store-ship, where his work-gang awaited him—twenty or more, Rotumahs, Kiwais, Binghis from Australia, native Papuans and what not.

Though the theft of ten thousand pounds worth of pearls would cause some stir, Baldwin felt quite safe as far as the discretion of the two blacks was concerned. Indeed, he felt safe in every way. No one could find the pearls in the deep cranny into which he had slipped them, and marketing them would be easy for him, a producer and dealer in pearls.

He had taken his chances and he had won—his danger had been from the sharks. Twice the night before, while he was looting the schooner in his diving-suit, he had seen the phosphorescent rushing of sharks in the water near him. Those had been bad moments, but Baldwin had never been a physical coward. Discovery, trial, imprisonment, loss of his wealth, was a different matter. He was glad he was safe from that.

But he was not as exultant as he had hoped to be. Deep down, that old fear still troubled him—foolish, how foolish! Why, there was not a chance in a million that any one would ever come to Marawa Island who could recognize him as the John Dinninger that had been, the John Dinninger that had been murdered. As for the danger that he would ever betray himself; he would never take a confidant—fools did that. Never, never, would he!

If he could only put the matter from his mind—and then he again remembered that there was one stranger on the island whom he had not yet seen—the assistant diver. Instantly he was nervously curious concerning him, and knew that he would continue to be so until he had seen him. So he left the jetty and went back to the barroom of the tavern.

THE assistant was not there, but the chief diver was. Here was a chance for information, at least; and presently Baldwin and the chief were standing before the bar. Alongside them and sitting around the room was a motley group—composed chiefly of the crew of the foundered *Mosby*.

"When do you intend to go down?" asked Baldwin.

"In the morning."

"A long job?"

"That depends on whether she can be patched up and floated. The cargo's mainly ruined. We'll see how she lies."

"You'll get to the pearls tomorrow, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, the pearls," the diver's voice held a peculiar inflection. "We'll get to them the first thing."

Baldwin read the other's thought.

"A bit injudicious of Captain Mowbray," he said, "telling everybody about 'em."

"Yes, I thought so too."

"That's why I suggested playing the search-light on the water around her all night, and keeping men of the crew on watch above her in boats," said Baldwin, easily. "Though six fathoms of water should be good burglary protection."

"Oh, yes, I suppose it was safe enough. How's the water for sharks this season?"

"About as usual—bad enough. One of 'em got a boy of mine last month. Hear you've got a new chum for assistant. Is he up to the sharks yet?"

"He's game enough. We've been doing some work off Thursday. He insists on turn and turn about in opening up a bit of work. It's then there's most danger, you know. He's first after the pearls tomorrow."

"I haven't seen him around," remarked Baldwin carelessly.

"No? I believe he's been taking a bit of a turn around the island. He said something about it."

"Well, here's how."

Baldwin lifted his glass.

At that moment the Japanese bar-boy turned and picked something from the shelf on which stood the many-shaped bottles. It was a square, sealed envelope, with Baldwin's name pen-printed in large letters across its face.

"I guess him for you. I find him here. A'right, eh?"

Baldwin set his glass down half-emptied, and took the envelope. Even such a little touch of the unknown troubled him, and he turned slightly away from the master diver as he ripped it open. He just had time to glance at the single sheet of paper which the envelope had contained, when a half-maudlin voice called his name from behind and he felt a hand on his shoulder. Hastily he jammed the paper back into the envelope, and turned and gulped down the rest of the drink.

The voice and the hand belonged to the youth Maharg, whose hail Baldwin had ignored half an hour before. Nevertheless, he was Baldwin's one drinking crony. Who Maharg was or where he had come from was not known and does not matter; he had simply stepped off a fishing-schooner a month before, and stayed on since. He was one of those unknown adventurers who sometimes drift across the South Seas as a wandering star drifts across the outer reaches of visible space, and away again.

He had money, wit, a strong liking for liquor, and youth, which latter quality caused him to feel flattered when Baldwin selected him for a companion. On Baldwin's part, he liked the stimulus of the boy's fresh vigor. Besides, he was lonesome. Perhaps Maharg had been lonesome, too; but he had better have remained so. Under the older man's influence, he went downhill fast. Lately he seemed to realize this, and made several attempts to check the pace, but always Baldwin found liquid or other means of breaking his resolution. Why Baldwin found amusement in this is hard to say.

But now Baldwin whirled on Maharg with a clenched fist. The diver, startled, thought the youth was going to be floored. And Maharg fell back in fright and put up his hands to defend himself.

"What the —— do you mean, pawing me like that?" cried Baldwin.

"Whazza matter, ol' fellow? Aren't you an' me fren's, eh? Jus' thought you might introjuce me——"

"——! You're drunk," rasped Baldwin in pretended disgust.

He turned his back on Maharg and faced the diver.

"Sorry," he apologized. "I've just thought of something. I'll see you later."

The others in the barroom glanced curiously at each other. They had not thought Maharg as drunk or Baldwin as finicky as appeared. And indeed, though Baldwin's words came unevenly and his voice sounded choked, it was not because of anger.

Nor was it merely good acting—quick thinking, also. At the instant of whirling at the touch of the hand on his shoulder, Baldwin had conceived the ruse of anger to cover the cold terror that had tightened his throat and whitened his features at first glimpse of the words on the paper.

Now, in his room, with his door safely

locked, he drew out that paper again with fingers that shook, and read the notice in its entirety. It was printed with a pen in small, neat letters, thus:

DIED

DINNINGER—In San Francisco, July 19th, 1918, John W. Dinninger, beloved son of the late Thomas H. Dinninger, age 32. To be buried March ——?, 1922.

"To be buried—" Baldwin read with whitening lips. "To be buried March ——?, 1922."

"Why, this is March, 1922," he gasped.

Mechanically, he started to read the notice over again.

"Died in San Francisco, July 19th, 1918 ——

"Well, he did die," he muttered, struggling to regain his poise. "John Dinninger did die. And he isn't going to come back again. And he isn't going to be buried again, either. Now, let's see!"

BUT for a moment he could see nothing but that he was face to face with the thing he had so long feared. Then for some minutes more the past came crowding upon him, crushing out even the present danger, and he could think of nothing but the John Dinninger that he had been, promising young cashier in a Piedmont bank. Prominent in the night life around San Francisco, too. A welcome hand at the wheel of a fast car; welcome at the offices of certain dealers in margins; welcome at the home of hostesses who were fastidious over the turn of a story or the angle of a tie. And of his first secret borrowing from the bank, his winnings, his losses, his regrets and wild plunging, the conviction that if he "doubled" his stakes often enough, he would be sure to recoup.

Then, with discovery facing him, the decision to make one last worth-while haul, and to throw the blame on another. It is easy for a clever man to falsify books; it is easy for a bank cashier to substitute packages of paper for hundred dollar bills; it is easy for him to conceal some of those stolen bills around the home of a hard-working bookkeeper. It is easy for him to inform the higher officials of his suspicions, to cause the bookkeeper to disappear temporarily by means of a fake message, zealously and conveniently to discover him again, and offer to make an appointment with him and deliver him to justice. Too easy—and the thing had been done before. In the midst of the working out of his plan, John Dinninger had realized that.

Fear had come to besiege him then, as for the last four years it had besieged him on this island. He realized that his plan was not infallible, that he might be under suspicion himself, that the higher officials might be merely playing with him, that there might be a counter-plot against him—and the bookkeeper in that counter-plot. Suddenly spies seemed all around him, the most innocent questions became efforts to entrap him, and a safe getaway seemed the most desirable thing in life.

But he had kept his nerve well, on the whole. He would probably have carried the plan through if chance had not offered him as a free gift the perfect escape for which he had longed.

It was night and an hour before his appointment with the bookkeeper, Lee Andrews by name, who was to meet him in a secluded spot in Golden Gate Park. Dinninger was driving toward San Francisco, along the beach road, when he came upon a pedestrian who had been run down and killed by an automobile, and left lying where he fell. The pedestrian's features were marred past recognition. His height and weight were about the same as Dinninger's, his hair was of the same color, and he appeared to be a young man. Standing over him, and realizing these facts, an inspiration came to Dinninger. If he cared to disappear, here was a means of covering his flight.

Dinninger's nerves were worn ragged; they cried for relief from suspense, for relief from San Francisco. His parents were dead, he had no relatives at all in the West, no one would be apt to discover his change of identity with the dead man. He took the body in his car and drove off the road among the sand-dunes. There he changed outer clothes with the unknown—an unpleasant job. He got to the park and to his meeting place with Andrews ten minutes before the latter was scheduled to appear.

There he left the dead body to keep tryst with Andrews. In the bottom of the tonneau was a heavy wrench; he threw that out beside the body. Then he drove away to the place he had cached his money and that night San Francisco saw the last of him.

He could not, of course, have planned or even foreseen exactly what had followed—that Andrews would be discovered, bending over the body, by a park policeman, that he would be arrested for the murder, tried, convicted and sentenced to life. Certainly there had been a clear case against Andrews the supposed embezzler, supposedly trapped and accused by Dinninger—motive, opportunity, the weapon, and the policeman's testimony. He was really lucky that he had not been given the gallows instead of life.

So that was the way Dinninger had died, and the way Baldwin had been born full-grown. Once started, he could not flee fast or far enough, and so he had come to the southern end of New Guinea, and then to the islands beyond—which seemed to him the end of all the world. Finally he had settled upon Marawa Island and had been happy for a while. He seemed so very far away from anything on that palm-crowned island, surrounded by tangling, treacherous tideways. And his jaded nerves had been beguiled by a sense of leisure, deep and exhaustless, flowing about him like the sea.

But then had come visitors. And *fear*. Supposing one of these had known him in the past!

Soon he became aware that Torres Straits was not, after all, the jumping-off place that it seemed. Rather, it was a passageway between two worlds, a place of crossing paths. Here all men, sometime, met some one they had known in the past. That was the saying and it increased his uneasiness. His fear showed in his eyes and men drew away from him. Then had come loneliness, and sun and sun and sun, and too much thinking; and for relief he had turned to pearling and trading and drink.

He had always been avaricious and wealth-getting became a passion with him. But as he acquired wealth, his fear increased—he had so much more, now, to lose.

Drinking gave him forgetfulness for a time—lately a peculiar and dual form of forgetfulness. Drinking, he forgot the distant past; sober, he could not remember the immediate past—that is, the final period of his drunkenness. That latter form of forgetfulness worried him. How could he tell how loosely his tongue swung during those periods which he could not remember? But there was one secret that nothing would ever persuade him to whisper, neither drink nor love nor torture. So he had resolved.

Now that secret had been discovered. Shivering, Baldwin drew a bottle of trade-gin from a drawer and drank until his blood ran warm again.

Of course, he had been recognized. By some one from the past, some one who had known him. Instantly he thought of the assistant diver, who had been so careful to keep out of his sight.

Indeed, it could be no other. The natives were out of the question. As for the other whites on the island, Baldwin knew them all and their histories and that none of them could have known him as Dinninger. And no mail had come to the island for a month. Certainly it was the assistant diver; he was trying to break Baldwin's nerve before he faced him. Or perhaps he was not quite sure of his ground, and used the trick of the death notice in hopes that Baldwin would betray himself when he read it.

To be buried March ——, 1922.

The attack upon Baldwin's courage was clever enough. But it had the weakness that it was also a warning. It gave Baldwin a chance to crouch and spring. It gave him hours alone, in his room, to meditate—as he was doing now—over the years and endless years of stripes and barred sunlight that he saw in prospect. To whip his fears up to the striking and his courage up to the sticking point. To take many drinks from the square-faced bottle of gin.

All day he stayed in his room, pretending sickness. If he were to go out and meet the assistant diver, who could tell what might happen? He might be accused, he might lose his temper, he might just be unable to control his features—the littlest thing would be sufficient to point the finger of suspicion at him when the assistant diver disappeared. But as things were now, he would be immune from suspicion. Why, every one would know that he had never even seen the man.

LATE in the afternoon he sent for Maiokah and Kimiachi. They found their master a fear-shaken, drink-steadied creature of cold ferocity who harshly bade them do thus and so. They left with the lesson seared a little more deeply upon their souls that obedience to the white man is the only virtue and that the wages of its opposite is death.

Baldwin put himself to sleep with drink

that night, but was awake early enough the next morning. Too early, for he lay for an hour reviewing the past and peering into the future, while his drink-born ferocity ebbed. Pity for the bookkeeper Andrews came to him then, and pity for the assistant diver who was to die that day, and pity for himself, whose course led downward and still downward. But at last he arose with an oath and fortified his will from the bottle. And when he found thrust under his door another square white envelope containing another identical envelope, he felt back to last night's form.

The sun was not yet up when he left the rear of the tavern, but the smell of woodsmoke was beginning to mingle with the heavy fragrance of frangipani bloom. No one was stirring about the tavern, however, and Baldwin was assured that no one saw him as he walked boldly past the warehouse and into the brush beyond.

However, if he was seen, it did not matter much. For various reasons, he had cultivated a reputation for irregular hours and eccentric conduct.

He traveled by a very roundabout route, and by the time he reached the meeting place with Maiokah and Kimiachi, it was growing light.

It was a cave-like niche, directly inland from the foundered ship. Into this niche tumbled a little creek from the center of the island, almost lost in a screen of shrubbery and waist-high reed-grass. In the bottom of the channel, where it would not break down the shrubbery, lay a heap of diving-gear. Across this diving-gear lay a ten-foot bamboo spear, tipped with steel.

An hour passed while the three crouched there—Baldwin and Maiokah and Kimiachi—watching to see the launch from which the two divers were to work, put off from the little jetty.

Once Baldwin overcame some inner revulsion and picked up the spear while the two blacks watched him fixedly. He forced himself to thrust at a sapling, and pierced it; then he drew the rear edge of the blade, curved inward like a pruning hook, against a slender branch which it clipped off neatly as a razor. Then Baldwin grunted his approval of the tool which Maiokah had made for him.

Maiokah grinned, not his usual abjectly subservient grin, but one of real appreciation of what was coming.

"You try eet against this, eh?" and he pointed to the coils of red rubber-tubing which is the diver's life.

Baldwin shot him a glance that silenced him. The white man had seen camaraderie shining for the first time from the bead-like eyes of the black, and he did not like it. Then, bending over, Baldwin laid the spear flat in the water. So cleverly had Maiokah leaded it along its length that it seemed to have neither weight nor buoyancy, but lay submerged, level with the surface of the water, ready for a thrust.

Another long wait. Then, a group on the jetty. Two on the launch, and others passing diving-gear down to them. Baldwin recognized the figures of the chief diver, three of his own blacks loaned for the occasion, a visiting pilot, Maharg. Yes, Maharg was going out. It was the fourth white man, the assistant diver, that Baldwin studied most intently. He fancied that there was something familiar about his figure and movements. At that distance he could make out little about his features.

"All right. Help me on with the gear." Baldwin was surprized to find his voice sounded about the same as usual.

He stripped off the outer-garments, leaving on some heavy woolen underwear which he had donned in his room. The two blacks helped him on with the air-tight canvas dress, with tight rubber bands at ankles and wrists, and with the heavy boots weighted down with brass. They laced his corslet, put his heavy helmet on, and screwed on his chest and back weights. Then Maiokah began to pump, Kimiachi screwed on the face-glass, and Baldwin stood there in his swelling diving-dress, which seemed to cut him off from the world.

Very lonely he felt, indeed; the loneliest of all mankind; and he swallowed hard over something that rose in his throat and well-nigh choked him. But the air was pulsing into his helmet, the pressure was increasing, in another moment the launch would be putting off for the wreck; and he forced himself to step off the coral bank and into the water.

The bottom slanted steeply downward, and in a moment the water was over his head. Sea-weed and coral trash were about his feet, and his spear lay level in the water before him. From the escape valve in his helmet, a stream of tiny bubbles rose to break upon the surface.

Dully, he wondered that for the first time he was entering the water without fear of the normal dangers of diving. The chance of a choked air-pipe, of a devil-fish tangling itself in the line, of a stupid and inexorable ox-ray attaching itself with the grip of death, and—worst of all!—of the sharks. No one can be called a coward for dreading such things. But to Baldwin this morning these dangers seemed very remote, almost insignificant.

As he got into deeper water, he found himself walking in a very forest of coral, growing out of a white, sandy bottom, dotted with star-fish.

The branches of this coral were of all shapes and nearly all colors—rose, amber, madder, and heliopora-coral black as night. Fishes darted, drifted and slowly swam in and out among them—beautiful fishes, misshapen fishes, fishes drab and green and yellow and red and brilliantly variegated as a bird of paradise. The bolder of them followed Baldwin and circled inquisitively around his helmet.

But suddenly ahead of Baldwin appeared the horror of the deep—a giant devil-fish, half in and half out of a black grotto, its tentacles fanning the water hungrily. And Baldwin, his nerves strung tight, recoiled, not from fear, but from a terrible and grotesque comparison which came to his mind.

It was that as he was feeling his way toward the black corpse of the ship, so this creature was also feeling its way to murder with every cup and sucker. He and it, alike! The thought was so repellent that it checked him for a moment. Then he brushed it away, skirted the devil-fish widely, and went on.

In a few minutes more he saw the ship. She lay almost level on her keel, in a very jungle of coral which rose up about her sides.

Coming alongside the hull, Baldwin used his spear to help him clamber up among the coral branches. Then, planting the point of his spear in a stout crotch, he leaned it against the hull and clambered upward. The inflated suit made him light as a featherweight, and he grasped the gunnel without any difficulty.

As he peered over the gunnel there was a flurry in the water near him. A great, gray shape, still haunting the wreck for food, darted away swift as lightning. Near the bow it turned and hovered uncertainly.

Keeping an eye on the shark, Baldwin drew himself over the rail. From this point he had planned his movements exactly, and very swiftly he executed his plan. The after hatch-cover had been battened down, but Baldwin had removed it last night when he went after the pearls, and it now lay beside the hatch opening. It was only slightly heavier than water, and Baldwin lifted it easily and pushed it over to the rail.

By the time he had done so, the first gray murderer of the sea had been joined by another.

Their incessant weaving back and forth in the water, ever a little nearer to him, sent crinkles along Baldwin's spine. Through his great glass goggles he eyed the sharks with the hatred which all men learn to feel for them in Torres Straits. Then he remembered that they are cowardly killers, who usually attack only inactive or retreating men, and besides, that he meant to use them as scapegoats for his crime. And he steadied himself and up-ended the hatch-cover, leaning it in a slanting position against the rail.

He then drew back the slack in the rubber tubing and the life-line, and lowered it over the side. Keeping his eyes on the sharks, and his spear ready, he knelt and bent his smallish body forward, and so, crouching, backed in between the hatch cover and the rail. Reaching up, he shifted the air-tube and the life-line until they were also concealed behind the hatch-cover. Then he laid the spear lengthwise of the waterway and put one foot upon it.

Now, when the diver landed on the deck, there would be no part of Baldwin's equipment visible to him, and no sign of Baldwin's presence, except the string of tiny bubbles flowing upward from his helmet.

True, if Baldwin were to use his own eyes, he must expose his helmet slightly, but that could hardly be avoided. A more complicated ambush might have been contrived, but it would be too conspicuous. He must choose his moments for peering out.

There was no reason for concealment just now, and he edged forward half out of his ambush, alternately watching the sharks and the dark shadow of the launch's hull, wavering far above him. Encouraged by his inactivity, the sharks had come still closer. Baldwin, with the spear ready to his hand, and able to withdraw instantly into the narrow space between hatch-cover and rail, felt quite safe from them. But he wished that the diver would hurry.

He wanted to get the thing over, and get back into the air again, among his own kind. Then the thought of the devil-fish recurred to him—a subtle mockery! This time the thought closed upon his mind as if it, too, were tentacled, and forced him to contemplate the horrible comparison. Why, here was his kind!

"The devil-fish and me, the devil-fish and me!" he muttered and tried to grin defiantly inside his helmet.

He fidgeted and eyed the sharks and waited. Presently, looking up, he saw that his vigil was nearly ended. Another dark, wavering shadow had entered the water beside the hull of the launch. Slowly it drifted downward, a grotesque, sprawling shape of changing outlines. Baldwin's muscles tensed. There was a chance that the diver would land so near him that discovery would be immediate.

But instead the diver settled slowly down upon the ship's deck, almost exactly 'midship. For a moment he had his back turned toward Baldwin. Then he turned half-way around, facing the sharks, which had retreated nearly to the schooner's prow.

Baldwin held his position. There was no danger of discovery. The sharks would hold the diver's attention safe enough.

Now, without turning, the diver began to step slowly backward, toward the after hatchway through which he must descend after the pearls. It was an apparent retreat, and suddenly one of the sharks whirled with incredible swiftness and shot toward him.

But the diver was almost equally quick. He thrust out both his arms, and by twisting his wrists inside the rubber wrist-bands, he loosed two strings of silver bubbles as big as dollars. At the same moment, he strode forward. The ancient diver's trick succeeded once more; the cowardly murderer of the deep sheered wide of its mark; and Baldwin, who had held his breath breathed again.

The diver resumed his movement backward toward the hatchway, and Baldwin watched him with growing horror and perplexity.

He knew that he must go through with the thing he had planned to do, but now he almost wished that he had never planned it. And why should that be, since it was an entirely natural act of self-defense? *To be buried March ——?, 1922.* Was not that a threat against Baldwin's very life? Perhaps, indeed, the burial intended was that of a prison cell, but what mattered it?

Threatened, he was protecting himself, and doing it in the safest way. In the simplest way, a way that would add to the terrible fame of the sharks of Torres Straits. Merely, he would wait till the diver had descended that hatchway, and then cut air-hose and life-line. Jaggedly, as a shark's teeth might—was there ever a safer killing?

Tentatively, the diver lowered one foot through the hatch-opening, feeling for the step. He found it, and followed with the other foot, and the sharks suddenly swam in closer. Their food was escaping, and they knew it, but they would hardly have rushed, had there not occured just then one of the unexpected happenings of the treacherous depths that make the average diver's life a short one.

Baldwin, watching, saw a conculsive movement run over the distended garments of his enemy, saw him struggle to tear his feet away from something that had clutched them, saw him bend and grip the edge of the hatch-opening with both his hands, and vainly strain with all his strength to free himself. Baldwin saw nothing more than that, but it was enough.

It told him that the diver was doomed, without Baldwin himself lifting a finger.

Baldwin had counted the sharks as his allies. Another ally had lurked unseen beneath the hatch-opening, and Baldwin now needed to do nothing but crouch there, and watch his victory shape itself.

To be sure, the sharks had retreated when the diver began to struggle, but they would return again. Instinct or rudimentary reason would tell them enough of the situation to assure them of their victim. They would know that the devil-fish had lain in wait there, in his shadowy retreat——

"As I lay in wait here," thought Baldwin.

He looked to see muscular brown tentacles, tough as rubber, rise through the hatch opening and twine around the diver's legs. Nothing of the sort happened, but it was clear that the diver was held hopelessly fast. Baldwin imagined a horny beak striking and striking again.

The diver fought for perhaps thirty seconds, then flung up a hand and jerked twice on the life-line. Almost instantly it tautened, but there was no hope there—the twining tentacles were stronger. Now they were so tight about the diver's legs that when he returned to the struggle he found he could not move them.

And a shark was coming now, straight and swift as an arrow. Belly-up, it was turning.

"Allies all!" thought Baldwin fiercely, and found himself thrusting with the spear without knowing how he had got to his feet and over the hatch cover.

The shark was almost upon the diver, but it chanced that the point of the spear went home. Baldwin was whirled off his feet and jerked a-sprawl through the water; then he dropped upon the deck again as the shark freed itself from the steel. The wounded animal swam off in a series of mad gyrations; but his mate had been only an instant later in charging, and the taste of blood was in the water.

There was a flurry of shark, man, air-hose and life-line. Exactly what happened, Baldwin never knew. The shark was entangled someway with his lines, his spear was gone and he was being jerked about giddily. Chance gave him a glimpse of the other man, who seemed to be attacking the Thing that was holding him with the spear that Baldwin had lost. Possible enough, thought Baldwin, and was whirled from his feet again. Then he felt his air-pipe go and the sudden weight of the waters.

Then blackness, and suffocation, and—death!

"YES, this is death. But not the death of a devil-fish."

It seemed to him that something seized his arm, and then that he was crushed into nothingness by the deadly pressure of the sea.

But after a while he realized that he had not died. Just that, at first. Then pain came to him, and after that, the sound of human voices. And of laughter! The hysterical, uncontrolled laughter of a man.

Baldwin did not know where he was nor what had happened, and he had not as yet the strength to open his eyelids; but he listened—listened with all his soul. And presently could distinguish words.

"There, there," some one was saying, evidently to the man who laughed. "It's all right. And you're all right. Laugh away and cry if you like. I'd do the same. As for this fellow, maybe you did right to drag him up. And maybe not. He was goin' to kill you, and he saved your life. Plain enough. But why?"

"I think I can explain that," this sounded like Maharg speaking. "He must've thought it was Staples here that sent him the death notices. But it was me that sent 'em. I thought——"

"Death notices! Why, whatever d'ye mean, Maharg?"

"I'll tell you. It's a long story."

But as Maharg told it, it was not so long—the story of the embezzlement, the plot against the bookkeeper, the chance that bettered the plot and the flight of Dinninger—"Baldwin, here!"—leaving behind him an innocent man to be imprisoned for life. The whole story that Baldwin had contained within himself so long—and while it was being told, the man who was laughing struggled with his laughter, and finally controlled it, sobbed for a minute or two and then was silent.

"Good boy! Buck up." Baldwin knew it was the chief diver speaking. "And don't be ashamed. I'd 'a' done worse. What then, Maharg?"

"Well, I wrote some death notices for Dinninger. The kind that must've been in the papers. With the date that he was supposed to have been killed—and everything. I wanted to see how he'd take 'em, so I'd know if the story was true. And you saw how he took the first of them yesterday, at the bar."

"Oh-ho! So that was it! I remember. Seems to me I remember something else, too. What was that date?"

Maharg told him.

"All right," the diver nodded. "And then?"

"Well, that's all," went on Maharg, "except that I slipped another note under his door last night. And he must've thought it was Staples doing it, and so——"

"I'm beginnin' to see. But where did you drift from? And how did you find all this out? Did you know him before, or what?"

"Drifting, that's the word. Driftwood, that's me. I came from somewhere and I drifted here. And I never saw him before, nor heard of him. But he took to me kindly and told me the story himself. That's why I thought maybe it wasn't true."

"When he was drunk, eh?"

"When he was drunkest." There was a grin in Maharg's voice.

Baldwin opened his eyes at that, and managed to mutter:

"I didn't. I couldn't."

He was lying in the after part of the launch, with Maharg and the chief diver looking down upon him, and he saw that their eyes were hard. And he himself felt very weak and very sick and very indifferent to everything, except just that one point, that he *couldn't* have told Maharg, not even when he was "drunkest."

"I didn't. I couldn't," he repeated. "It's all true—no use to deny it—and I'll tell you something about your pearls, too, presently. But I didn't tell you that. Over and over again, I told myself that I wouldn't tell any one, ever."

"Which was a mighty good way to make sure you would tell sometime, when the guard was off," said the chief diver, dryly. "But let that go—it doesn't matter. And I'll tell *you* something presently. But why—" He hesitated. "You sure set out to kill Staples, here, and yet you saved his life when you knew it'd mean death or worse for you. Now, why was that?"

"I don't know," said Baldwin wearily. "Except that I couldn't be mate to a devil-fish."

"So! Well, that's something, anyway. Quite a bit, in fact. 'Pears to me that secret done you dirt, like secrets usually do. And here's something else. You never really was 'dead,' not even legally, and Bookkeeper What's-his-name never went to the pen."

"What's that?" Baldwin's voice came feebly.

"I was in San Francisco—remember the case." It was odd how disjointed the chief diver's sentences sounded in Baldwin's ears. "—case made a big stir—was sentenced, all right—but attorneys got next to who dead man really was—bank auditors cleared him—embezzlement charge—cashier now—your job—say, look here!"

"Glad of that, anyway," half-whispered Baldwin. "Good man! It kept bothering me—thinking him in——"

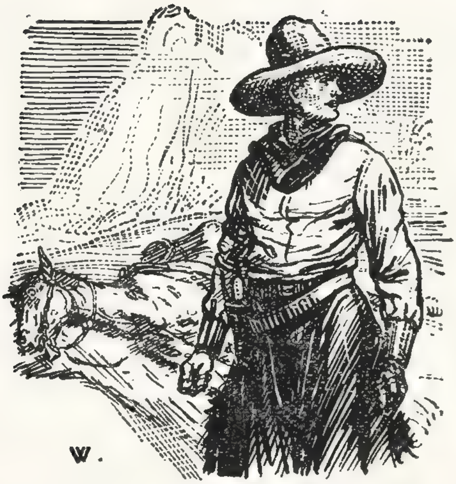
His whisper passed into silence and he closed his eyes again.

Maharg and the two divers stared down at him, with something new in their eyes. Here was a man—at last! Facing his fate—not fleeing from it! Thinking of others! And these, after all, were the Torres Straits. Some such thoughts as these inspired the questioning look that each man, after a moment, cast at the other two.

"Well," said the chief diver mildly, "as far as I'm concerned, I'm no policeman."

The other two nodded agreement. Prisons are not popular in the South Seas.

"It'll be hard to explain how he got hurt, but I guess we can manage it," concluded the chief diver. "Now, let's get back to Marawa Tavern."



ROBIN HOOD FROM TEXAS

A Complete Novelette

By

H. C. WIRE

CHAPTER I.

A KNIGHT COMES RIDING

SHADOWS of evening had not yet fallen over the foot-hills along the base of Big Smoky when two horsemen, who had been trotting single-file down the trail out of Thunder Gap, suddenly drew in their mounts, then, whirling, sent them scrambling up the cañonside on their left.

On top of the ridge they slowed to a walk and continued down the backbone parallel to the cow-path now a hundred yards below.

The leader, a slender, hard-bodied man, bent forward in his saddle, his eyes, staring from beneath a black Stetson, taking in every curve of the cañon out of which he had climbed. A noticeable thing about him was a growth of red stubble that seemed to conceal the features of his lean face.

The other man, a Mexican, rode slouchily; his half-closed black eyes apparently observed nothing beyond the tip of the unlighted cigaret which hung from his drooping lower lip.

Presently the leader halted.

"Duarte!" he called back, turning in his saddle. "Are you asleep?"

"No, *señor*. I see heem. There! Just beyond the bend."

The Mexican came abreast and stopped.

Both men were dressed peculiarly in a garb that seemed half from the cow-country, half from the mines. The high-crowned soft hat of the white man, the sombrero of the Mexican and the light cotton shirts each wore were of the cattle-range; but their heavy trousers and hob-nailed boots were those of the mountains.

In this mixed garb they but reflected the appearance of the country around them, a borderland where the ranchers of Banning Valley pushed their fence-lines far up into the foot-hills and ranged their cattle almost to the ore-dumps of the abandoned mines on the slopes of Big Smoky.

Motionless, the two sat squinting down at a lone rider who came at a slow trot up the cañon trail. Although he was too far distant to be recognized their right hands had dropped to rifles slung in saddle-scabbards beside them.

After a short time of waiting the white man slipped his weapon back in place.

"You stay here, Duarte," he said, "and stop that *hombre* if he keeps on toward Thunder Gap. I've got to be in Banning before dark. When you're through, come on in. Meet me at Jay Kelley's."

"*Sí, señor*. I stop heem."

The Mexican slid from his horse, crossed to the brink of the ridge and crouched behind a clump of juniper overlooking the cañon.

He waited until the rider was directly below, then thrust his rifle through the trees, squinting down the barrel.

The sharp crack broke harshly into the quiet of the cañon. The Mexican's mouth curled in a mirthless grin as he saw the man below jerk to a sudden stop, his horse's nose almost over a puff of dust rising from the trail.

But that grin suddenly passed as the man,

"*Robin Hood From Texas, copyright, 1924, by H. C. Wire.*

raking his spurs on the animal's side, leaped ahead. He had almost reached the protection of a bend in the path when the Mexican rested his rifle in a crotch of the juniper and drew a bead on the flying horse.

The next instant horse and rider were plowing a cloud of dust from the cañon trail.

For a moment the Mexican waited; then apparently satisfied, he leaped to his own mount and keeping behind the crest of the ridge, rode on toward Banning.

Down in the cañon, "Rosey" Hix, late of Piute Basin and the V Bar ranch, crawled from the bank of buckthorn into which he had rolled, and rubbed the muscles of a numbed right arm. When he stood up it was like the rising of an angry grizzly bear, a sudden upheaval of a huge bulk, shaking itself free of dust.

There were six feet of him; big bones padded with muscle that bulged beneath the slits of his torn gray shirt. His movements, as he continued rubbing his bruises, were slow, almost awkward, as if holding in check the full force of his great strength.

A man seeing only that part of Rosey from his neck down might easily think of the grizzly bear and hesitate long before crossing him. But on seeing his face he would think only of a beaming full moon. For Rosey's face was round, his cheeks were smooth and blushing; his blue eyes looked out from beneath light hair that, unparted, lay flat and smooth over the dome of his head.

It had sometimes happened that men, not looking beyond the friendly full moon, had goaded the bear. Then they had learned something.

For behind Rosey's ready good nature there was fighting blood that was slow to cool when once aroused. It was running hot now as, finished with the survey of his own injuries, he crossed to his fallen horse.

The animal was dead, shot behind the shoulder in a place that could not have been better chosen. That the bullet was stray and had just happened to travel across a good-sized cañon and land in the most vital spot of a loping horse, was something Rosey, credulous cowpuncher though he was, could hardly believe. Especially since that shot had been preceded by one that he now realized had been sent as a warning.

He turned from his dead horse to scan the opposite slope of the cañon. Along the ridge nothing moved; there was no flag of dust nor rattle of loose rock to show that anyone had been in ambush above the trail to Thunder Gap.

"Just what in ——," Rosey reflected, "should Robin Hood do in a case like that?"

There seemed but one thing at present—return to Banning, a place through which he had passed just before entering the hills. He stripped the bridle and saddle-pack from his horse and shoved the carcass over the bank of the trail. As he looked down at the animal his eyes felt hot; nor was he ashamed of his show of grief for his slaughtered friend.

"I'll find out who did it, Buck, old boy," he promised. "And don't you worry your bones none over what I'll do then!"

Returning to his saddle, he hoisted the outfit over one shoulder and took up the back trail to Banning, two hours away.

The town had not interested him as he had ridden through it that afternoon. It was a cow-town—and he was through with cows. Bitterly he thought of the old V Bar. Just at the time when he and his partner had established themselves as respected ranch-owners of Piute Basin, there had come the drouth; two seasons of scorching, rainless heat, parching the land, killing cattle by thousands.

Many ranchmen had been ruined. The V Bar had not gone completely on the rocks, but it had simmered to less than a one-man outfit.

"Take the —— thing!" Rosey had said to his partner. "You've got a girl to keep you here in the Basin. I've got nothing but a grouch against the world. I'm pulling out."

Being next to broke, but footloose, was not without advantages. He had his horse and an incurable desire to find new places, new people and perhaps new battles. Here was a chance to scratch the itch from the soles of his feet. All he lacked was a promising destination.

Then one night he had treated himself to a movie and had been inspired. For two hours he had sat spellbound while a husky old-timer in short pants bounced over the landscape, getting himself out of trouble and others into it, making good *hombres* out of bad ones as he went.

"What a hell-cat he could have been," Rosey had pondered, "if he'd had modern tools! That long-haired bird, fighting with a fence-pole and riding a plow-horse with its blanket still on, wasn't anything compared to a six-foot cowpuncher forking a red-eyed bronc."

The more Rosey had thought, the more he had become convinced that the world, especially a certain part along the Texas-New Mexico line, might still be in need of a Robin Hood—a real one, up to date; a man like Rosey Hix, for example.

The urge had grown into a reality, and he had set out, a knight of the sage appeasing his desire to see new places and in the mean time looking for wrongs to make right. Texas had proved too peaceable to need even a sheriff; New Mexico, until the last few minutes, had promised nothing better.

But with the crack of a rifle times had changed.

CHAPTER II

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

THE first thing Rosey saw on his return to Banning was a pack of dogs that ran out snapping and snarling at his heels. A little later, farther down the street, he saw a group of men eying him from the porch of Jay Kelley's Bar, and he thought the dogs more friendly.

Dusk of evening had settled about the little cow-town, blotting out the corrals, leveling the few shacks to a gray-brown color like that of the brush flat on which they stood. Half a dozen lights blinked in the shadows, the brightest coming from the open door of Jay Kelley's.

Rosey turned toward this beacon and, unheeding the scrutiny of the men on the porch, passed through the doorway, dropping his saddle in front of the bar.

Jay Kelley's seemed to be making one last stand to continue the days that were. Before the mirror running full length of the wall back of the bar were piles of sandwiches where once pyramids of glittering glasses had stood. Bottles of pop were arrayed along the shelves, and over the brass spigot out of which had come stuff that foamed and quenched men's thirst was now the sign "Near Beer."

So much for the outward show. But there was a smell about the place that spoke of more than soda-pop. That flat bottle, which Rosey had seen disappear behind the bar as he had entered, looked familiar. Those men around the corner table were mighty happy over their mugs of ginger ale. Altogether the place had an air of distinction.

Feeling in his pocket, Rosey found the last of his wealth, then scanned the price list over the mirror for something he could buy with fifteen cents. He was hungry.

"Ham sandwich and a cup of java," he said to the bar flunky.

The man winked wisely, asking—

"That all?"

"Yep."

On returning with the order the fellow leaned over the bar, glancing down at Rosey's saddle.

"Hoofin' it?" he asked.

"Ain't flyin'."

"Where's your cayuse?"

"My horse," Rosey replied, lifting his voice that all might hear, "has gone to heaven, and I'm looking for the low-down skunk that sent him there!"

"Who did it?" The bartender's face showed unmistakable signs of interest.

"Don't know, but I will."

The other man grinned.

"Seems like you've strayed outa your range," he said, as if by way of advice, then turned to wait on another customer.

Rosey continued with his sandwich. He had not yet finished when he felt a hand touch his shoulder, and, turning, he gazed into a face that instinctively he did not like. He saw a slender, hard-bodied sort of man whose narrowed eyes looked at him from over a stubble of red beard.

"Can I see you a minute?" the newcomer asked. "Got a table over here in the corner."

"Important?" Rosey demanded, cherishing the last few bites of his meal.

"Yes."

"All right, then."

As Rosey followed the man toward a table in the far corner of the room, he noticed that another, a Mexican, was already seated there.

"Sit down and have a drink," Rosey was invited.

He refused the glass.

"Thanks. Don't use the stuff any more. You can't tell what kind of bug juice you're getting these days." He remained standing. “Well, what's on your mind?”

The Mexican was pretending sleepy indifference to what was going on. The first man scowled.

“Stranger here?” he demanded.

The dislike Rosey had felt on first seeing him had suddenly changed to distrust. There was something shifty about the fellow; a sneaking treachery somewhere in his make-up. Already angered by the afternoon's events, Rosey gave full swing to the venom within him.

“Am I stranger here?” he retorted. “I'll think about it. If I'm not I'll come around and tell you. If I am I suppose I'd better get your permission to stay.”

The two men glared at each other over the table.

The Mexican started to rise.

“Sit down, Duarte!” the white man ordered.

To Rosey he said:

“Get too free with your mouth, stranger, and you'll sure get into trouble. That's why I asked you over here. Nobody wants to hear about how you lost your horse. Understand? What's your name anyway?”

“My name,” said Rosey, with a sneering drawl, “‘is Robin Hood from Texas! And if you don't know what that means you're as unwise as you're unhandsome. As for my horse ——”

A blow on the mouth cut short his words. He staggered back, tripped over the outstretched foot of Duarte. Whirling, he jerked the chair from beneath the Mexican and sent him crashing into the wall.

Before he could turn again, the first man was upon him. Rosey stooped, clamped his arms around the legs at his back and stood up, carrying the man toward the door.

Just beyond the opening he stopped suddenly and bent his body downward, bucking his captive into the street below.

“And that's just a starter of what you'll get,” he flung after him, “if you tangle with Robin Hood!”

The man stood up, cursing, but made no move to return.

OF ALL the spectators who had watched the fight, there was one who had remained unmoved from his seat at a table near one side of the room; yet no eyes had followed the big cowpuncher's movements with keener interest.

He was a venerable old man, typical of the pioneer ranchers who had been first to range their cattle west of the Pecos. His gray-bearded face was stern, the face of a fighter, yet there was humor in its lines and the utmost fairness in the depths of his sharp gray eyes.

He was small of stature, but time had not diminished the strength of his rugged frame, and he looked as if even now he could stand up against any of the younger men there in Kelley's Bar.

He waited until Rosey came back to the corner table for his hat, which had been lost in the shuffle, then he stood up.

“Good work, Robin Hood,” he said smiling. “A bad job well done!”

Rosey turned, scowled. Then his face broke into a grin.

“Shucks!” he said. “That wasn't no job at all.”

“Just drifting through?”

“That depends.” Rosey hesitated, but seeing only friendly interest in the face of the other man, he continued. “I lost my horse this afternoon—bushwhacked up the cañon. I reckon to find out who did it, and why.”

“You'll be wanting a job, perhaps?”

“Sure, if it won't interfere too much with this other business.”

The older man's smile relaxed, and his face seemed to harden, as if he recalled thoughts that were none too pleasant.

“Sit down,” he said at last. “I think you'll be interested. You're a fighting fool, son, and I need that sort of a man to ride my fences. Banning's my name, Dave Banning.”

Rosey laughed as he clasped the hand extended toward him.

“Named before or after this valley?” he asked.

“Before. I was the first man in here. My place begins about ten miles north of town and runs into the foot-hills below Big Smoky.”

Rosey looked up with interest.

“I must have been close to your line when my horse was shot!”

“Perhaps.”

“Do you know the *hombre* I just bounced out of here?”

Banning's stern old mouth curved in a wry smile.

“I do—too well. He's called ‘Hotfoot’ Hayes. City chap—came in here and ran a bunch of cattle under a triple H brand until he got into some sort of a runkus and pulled out. He came back a few months ago and has gone in for mining up on Big Smoky. The mountain was supposed to have been cleaned out ten years ago—everything shut down. But Hotfoot leased one of the holes and keeps half a dozen or more men at work. He still has a small herd of his old triple H stuff up there on the mountain in a little out-of-the-way place called the Park."

The old ranchman sat drumming on the table top, lost in his thoughts.

"This Hotfoot *hombre* seems to have a Mexican for a side-kick," Rosey suggested after a while.

"Yes. But I don't know much about Duarte, except that he's always on hand when Hotfoot gets in trouble. Not much help at that, as you saw tonight. I wouldn't wonder if you'd see more of that pair, if you decide to take the line job I have open."

"Then I'll take it! I reckon they know something about what happened this afternoon. I might get a chance to ask 'em!"

"Good. I'll tell you more about the job later. It will mean trouble, though, I can say that much right now."

"What's the matter—rustling?"

"Worse than that. I've handled rustlers all my life, but a gang of murdering high-jackers is something different."

"Sounds fine," said Rosey, feeling more than ever like Robin Hood. "I ain't had a real good scrap since knighthood was in flower."

The two men stood up.

"Better go across to the hotel and get a room," said Banning. "I'll come along later. Tell the clerk you're working for me, and he'll fix you up. We won't drive out to the place until morning."

Rosey turned to go, then asked—

"What do you call your outfit?"

"The Double Cross."

"Huh?"

Banning laughed.

"You'll find the name fits," he added.

With his saddle-pack thrown over one shoulder, Rosey left Kelley's Bar and started toward the hotel, a dimly lighted two-story building a short distance down the street.

He walked slowly, pondering over the promise of his new job. He liked Dave Banning. The old man was obviously square and should prove a friend worth keeping.

"Lots of fight in the old boy yet," Rosey reflected. "Sure must be one —— of a mess if it had that man stumped!"

Lost in his thoughts, he had come opposite the hotel before he realized it. Suddenly he stopped as from within the place came the sound of voices lifted to an unnatural pitch; first a man's angry questioning, then a woman's defiant reply.

Rosey dropped his saddle lightly upon the steps, hitched his belt a little tighter and stepped to the half-open doorway. There he halted, his fists clenching. Another job for Robin Hood!

Across the width of the small front room he saw a man and a girl standing before the hotel counter. Apparently they waited for the clerk. They were standing close together, their faces turned from the entrance; the man was clutching the girl's arm.

"Tell him if you want to!" he was saying. "Think I'm afraid of your dad? ——!"

"Please, Monk; you're not yourself tonight."

The girl's voice seemed tired, Rosey thought, as if she had about reached her limit.

Three steps carried him half-way toward the man—after that he didn't have to look for trouble. It leaped to meet him. The air suddenly seemed filled with fists as the man whirled from the counter.

Rosey was caught with his guard down. He staggered back, dazed, then struck out in the general direction of a blurred form. He felt the impact of his knuckles on flesh, heard a muffled grunt, saw the man fall limp upon the floor. Then he caught a breath of whisky-laden air and he knew why the victory had been so easy.

But hardly had he lowered his arms before he saw a lithe shape hurtle toward him, and he recoiled from a stinging blow on his face.

"You bully!" the girl said. "Pick on a helpless drunk, will you?"

Surprized, feeling not a little rebuked, Rosey stared at her and saw a face strangely like one he had seen before. He saw in it plain spunk, good looks and considerable pride, hidden beneath a coat of tan that spoke of a life on the range.

"I'm sorry, miss," he apologized. "But I thought you needed help."

"I can take care of myself, thank you!" the girl retorted.

Rosey, rubbing a sore spot on his face, knew she could.

He would have said more, but there seemed nothing suitable. Then he heard the sound of footsteps on the hotel porch, a figure blocked the doorway, and his thoughts changed.

He saw the girl, instantly calm, cross toward the entrance.

"Buster, you've kept me waiting," she said accusingly, but the softness of her voice belied the anger of her words.

"Sorry, little girl, I had a business meeting."

That booming voice was familiar. Rosey turned.

"Hello," Dave Banning greeted him. "Thought you'd turned in."

"Haven't got a room yet."

"That so?"

Banning presented the girl.

"This is my daughter. Fay, meet Robin Hood. He's going to work for us."

"How nice—a Robin Hood," said Fay, giving Rosey a look that made him feel knee-high to a snake. "Always on hand to help people out of trouble. Is that it?"

"Fay!" Banning said reprovingly. He smiled at Rosey, adding, "She's a spoiled child, you see. But she's boss!"

His glance fell to the man sprawled on the floor.

"Well! What's the matter here?"

"Our Robin," Fay explained, "has been practising up on Hank Monk."

Banning frowned.

"This Hank Monk," he said, "is my foreman."

For a moment Rosey felt decidedly out of place, but something in the twinkle that had come into Banning's eyes reassured him, and he grinned.

"Fine way to start a new job, isn't it? Beat up my boss the first thing."

"Monk's all right when he stays away from the bootleg," the ranchman confided. "Probably won't remember what happened when he wakes up. You'll get along with him."

Rosey wasn't so sure of that.

"Now you'd better turn in," Banning continued. "Take any room up-stairs—this place is always empty. I'll tell the clerk you're here."

Half-way up the stairs, Rosey glanced back, and the expression he saw on the girl's face stayed with him. She was looking at her father, who was lifting Hank Monk into a chair. All the childish sauciness had gone; her face was serious, old, with lines of anxiety puckered above her eyes.

Something about the whole picture made Rosey clench his fists as he had done on first seeing Hank Monk and the girl.

As he reached the upper corridor and selected a room toward the front, he recalled the bit of conversation he had heard. What did Fay Banning have to tell; and why had Hank Monk said she was afraid of him? She didn't look like the sort of a person who would be afraid of any one or anything.

Sitting on the edge of his bed to pull off his boots, Rosey pondered these things and reached no conclusion.

"Robin Hood," he soliloquized, thrusting himself between white unfamiliar sheets, "thy king and country call. Get thee to —— on the job!"

CHAPTER III

THE DOUBLE CROSS

DAVE BANNING was modern. He may have been an old-timer but he kept pace with new ideas. This Rosey learned early the next morning when, instead of the buckboard he had expected, a high-powered car came to a stop in front of the hotel and the old ranchman sat "warming her up" and waking the town with the cannonade of his roaring motor.

Rosey carried his saddle outfit to the car and loaded it into the back seat.

"Morning, Sir Robin," was Banning's greeting. "All set?"

"Ready for anything!" Rosey replied. "Let's go."

As he climbed into the car he asked—

"How about the others?"

"Fay? She's riding her horse. Hates this thing. Monk's with her. They'll take a short cut and probably beat us home."

"Must be a mighty short trail," said Rosey, "if they can get in ahead of a machine."

He'd remember it! Those things often came in handy.

"It is a quick way," Banning agreed.

"Begins just outside of town and takes off into the cañon on the left, while we keep straight ahead."

Rosey noted the place—a rock-strewn path that he would hardly have seen had it not been pointed out. Then he sat back studying the country through which they passed.

The road along which Banning raced his car skirted the base of the Big Smoky mountains, dipping at times into cañons of the foothills, climbing again to follow the crest of low, brush-covered ridges.

The top of the car was down, and the upper glass of the windshield was gone. Rosey thrust his face into the rush of cool air, breathing deeply of it, tingling with the surge of life it brought. Before and below him Banning Valley, darkened by shadows of early morning, stretched like a broad gray gash cut between the high foothills on his left and the lower desert range some twenty miles across to the right.

As the sun came over the ridges the gray vanished, and he looked down upon a valley that held him speechless, fascinated. Spring was still upon this high rangeland; no drouth had turned its slopes to withered brown nor parched its flats to the color of powdered chalk.

Green was everywhere; green trees, and green grass through which cattle waded fetlock deep; a rolling sea of it, streaked in the valley bottom with the red and blue of wildflowers, smothered on the hill slopes with a white blanket of devil's wheat and flowering sage.

"It's cowman's heaven!" he exclaimed.

Banning laughed bitterly.

"It was, until last year. Since then it's been ——. I'll probably market just as fine a bunch of cattle this Spring as ever, but there's blood on the money I'll get. We stopped wearing guns on this range five years ago—we're doing it again now. I've lost two men in the last four months."

"Figure I'll be the third?" asked Rosey, grinning.

Banning did not reply. Presently he checked the speed of his car and brought it to a stop on the crest of a high spur.

"There's the place," he said. "You can get a good look at it from here."

Just ahead of the spur the valley swung at a sharp angle toward the left and ran into the mountains, where it narrowed to about five miles in width and ended in a succession of hills that rose to the base of Big Smoky itself.

On this narrowed portion of the valley floor, close into the conical mouth of a broad cañon, was a clump of cottonwoods in which were grouped the buildings of the Double Cross.

Letting his gaze sweep away from the ranch and the mountains, Rosey faced across the valley, toward the south. From the elevation of the spur he could look past the lower hills opposite, over a red gulf that he knew was desert, to where another mountain range rose soft-lined far beyond.

"That's the Sierra Madre," Banning explained, following Rosey's eyes. "They're across the line in Old Mexico."

"Cripes! Can we see that far? Must be close to a hundred miles."

"I'd rather it was a thousand. I reckon down there's where a good deal of our trouble is brewed. I'm speaking of bootleg now. Whisky runners made a regular trail through this valley until the state men came and headed 'em off."

Banning started the car and slipped down the grade. In a short time they had raced through the cottonwoods and stopped before the big adobe ranch-house.

"Quong Lung!" Banning called.

"All li, Mis' Dave," came a singsong voice from somewhere behind the house, followed presently by a grinning Chinese. "I see you come hill-top. Bleckfas' ledy now."

"Good for you. Got lots of mush? We're feeding a new hand."

Quong Lung nodded, shrugged and slick-slacked on to the veranda.

"You'll eat with me this morning," Banning explained, as he and Rosey followed the cook. "The other boys have already had theirs."

They had not yet entered the house when a sudden pounding of hoofs came from the cottonwood lane and a lathered horse swept down to the corrals. Its rider was Fay—alone. Giving her horse to a Mexican boy, she came on to where the two men waited.

Rosey wondered at her flushed face, and he thought the smile she gave her father was forced.

"Where's Monk?" Banning asked.

"I left him back there," Fay replied, waving vaguely at the hills. "He said he was going down in the valley to look for strays."

The ranchman gazed southward over the level floor.

"Don't see his dust," he remarked.

But the girl had already gone on to the house.

AN HOUR on the Double Cross was enough to convince Rosey that the name of the place was no joke.

"You'll need a horse," Banning said as they walked to the corrals after breakfast. "You can take Valentine's."

"I never hankered much to ride another man's cayuse," Rosey objected, "but seeing I'm broke——"

"Well, I suppose you can claim this one as your own, if you like."

"How come?"

"Valentine was shot last week. Found him dead on the road to Big Smoky. Just why he was up there is one thing I'd like to know. He was supposed to be riding the north fence and not gallivantin' around back there in the mountains."

Rosey caught the horse Banning pointed out and saddled it. He was a lank gray that had long since passed the best years of his life.

"Not so handsome as he might be," Rosey observed. "But he'll do for a spell. Now what's the program?"

"North fence—ride it and keep your eyes wide. Our round-up comes on directly so watch for strays in the cañons. That north line is all in the hills, and it's a hole for hiding stock if you don't keep track of them."

"How many do you run?"

"About four thousand head, with this Spring's yearlin's."

Rosey shifted his saddle, smoothing the blanket beneath.

"I suppose you don't do much ridin' yourself any more?"

"Don't have to. Monk's a good man; keeps the outfit going as well as I could. I reckon he's the best foreman in Banning Valley."

"I see." Rosey swung up on the big gray. "You don't mind if I scout around a bit this morning? Sort of want to get my bearings."

"Go ahead. Just get yourself acquainted today—that's enough. There's a line house at the end of the north fence that you will use afterwhile, but I expect you'd better figure on getting back here this evening."

"I'll aim to," Rosey promised. "Don't worry none if I'm late."

He touched the old gray and found the horse not as dead as it looked. With a wave to Banning he took up the trail that led across the cañon behind the ranch-buildings, into the hills and along the north fence.

CHAPTER IV

EMPTY SHELLS—AND OTHER THINGS

ROSEY was happy. The creak of leather, the swing of a horse beneath him, the smell of grass heavy in the morning air—here was life, and he loved it. Ahead lay a country that was new to him, its riddles unsolved, its dangers a mystery. What more could Robin Hood want?

When he had told Banning that he wanted to scout around a bit there had been a definite purpose in his mind. So he deviated often from the north fence trail, going down into cañons whenever he saw bunches of cattle and judging their number with a practised eye.

Three hour's riding had carried him well over a fourth of the country along the hills into which, as Banning had said, most of the herd had migrated to escape the heat of the valley. Yet in all that section Rosey had not counted more than six hundred head.

Circling back toward the fence, he sought the most likely places for grazing and found more animals, but all told he had not seen over a thousand. Doubling that for the territory he had not yet crossed, allowing some for strays hidden in the cañons ——

Rosey pulled his horse to a stop, shoved back his hat and surveyed the range about him.

"If there's three thousand head on this Double Cross," he observed, "then I'm a —— ignorant lunker! And the old man thinks he's got four."

He rode on, came again to the fence trail and continued up the slopes. By noon he had climbed to the crest of the first flank of hills, where the fence made a gradual turn and ran around the skirt of Big Smoky.

Resting his horse in the shade of a scrub-oak, he ate the lunch Quong Lung had prepared. As he sat pondering over the morning's discovery, the flight of a buzzard that wheeled over a cañon somewhere beyond the next ridge, attracted his attention. He followed it with his eyes for some time, thinking of his dead horse, and wondered how far he was from the Big Smoky trail.

Curiosity held him, and when, going on, he came to a low place in the fence, he let down the top strand of barbed wire and jumped his horse across. Beyond that he climbed the steep slope of a ridge and rode up the crest guided by the circling buzzard.

Presently he came to a spot where he could look down into the cañon over which the bird was flying, and there he stopped, staring upon the trail he had traveled the day before.

Looking closely at the ground beneath him, he saw fresh imprints of steel-shod feet, the space between them showing that the horse had been hard pushed. Farther on he saw more tracks, where two horses seemed to have stood and then the footprints of a man.

Rosey dismounted and followed them to a clump of juniper. There was no line of easy good nature on his face as he stooped and peered through a crotch in the tree to where the buzzard had settled on a buckskin carcass down below. Hate blazed in his eyes; his face was set grim.

He stooped, picked up two empty shells and held them in his hand, studying them. They were for a .38 revolver, but they had been shot from a rifle—no six-gun, Rosey knew, would have carried across that cañon. It was a combination he had seen before, but a rare one, for which law-abiding men had no need.

He dropped the shells in his pocket, mounted again and followed the two lines of horse tracks on up the backbone, then down the slope, stopping at last where the animals had been jerked from the cañon trail.

The signs were easily read.

"Saw me coming, or maybe heard me, and climbed the bank and bushwacked my horse from up on top. Two men coming from Big Smoky—that'll be Hotfoot Hayes and his greaser pal! But why in —— did they do it?"

This last was a question that would have to be answered later; his time now belonged to Dave Banning. Reluctantly Rosey pulled his horse from the cañon and headed back to continue his job.

Close under the towering brow of Big Smoky, where the fence line dropped almost straight down a rock wall, he halted abruptly, straining to catch a sound that had come from a narrow, tree-choked gulch below. In a moment it came again, a high-pitched wail, plaintive, pleading, ghastly in its likeness to an anguished cry of a human being.

Tensed in his saddle, Rosey listened until the sound died away. Then he slipped to the ground and, leading his horse, crept through the brush in the direction from which the cry had come.

He had not taken many steps when he heard a crash in the undergrowth below, then a rattle of loose rocks as something ran up the cañon bottom, He slipped the reins over his horse's head; then, shifting his gun closer to his right hand, he went on alone and, climbing down, came suddenly upon a dry stream-bed of considerable width.

It was like a hidden lane, arched over by the dense foliage of trees growing above and screened on both sides by thickets of brush. In the sand covering the bottom were hoof-prints of cattle, some old, a few freshly made.

But Rosey gave slight heed to these marks, for ahead the dragging, rattling sound continued. Parting the leaves of the bushes that concealed him, he peered up the cañon, frowned; then a grin covered his face and the muzzle of his gun dropped down.

As he stepped out into the stream-bed a fuzzy brown ball struggled away from him, a cub bear dragging a broken fore-leg, blood streaming from a gash along one side. Turning back, it attempted a growl, then hobbled off on three legs.

"Poor little ——," Rosey sympathized. "Some one sure creased you, didn't they."

He ran after the cub, which gained surprizing speed in spite of its wounds. Near a fallen tree it swung from the canon bottom and slipped through the mat of dead limbs. Rosey heard the sounds of its struggle up the bank. He followed, clawing his way over the tree-trunk that blocked an indistinct path.

The bear was going more slowly on the hillside above, panting for breath, loss of blood sapping its strength. Several times it fell, but was up again before Rosey could reach it. Then, with one final effort it lunged from the path, rolled between two boulders and was still.

Rosey drew near and held his hat over the cub's head as he stooped to examine the wound. But that precaution was needless, for the animal lay like a pile of brown fur, motionless save for the heaving of its sides.

When Rosey removed his hat the bear's brown eyes followed him, pleading with him, he thought.

"That's all right, little feller," he said quietly. "You're in a bad mess, but I reckon we can fix you up."

He held one hand under the bear's jaw, guarding against a sudden bite should the pain of the operation he intended to perform cause trouble. Then he examined the broken leg, finding that the flesh had been torn by shot and the bone splintered halfway above the paw.

With a splint of oak and strings of cloth torn from his shirt he set the break and bound it. Throughout the ordeal the bear made little objection, being apparently too far spent to fight at the pain. When the job was done it licked the bandage on its leg and sniffed Rosey's hand.

He chuckled.

"Surprized you some, eh? Guess you don't know anything about Robin Hood!"

Blood was still flowing from the long gash on the bear's side, promising to weaken the animal beyond recovery if it were not stopped. Rosey sat regarding it for some time, a thoughtful scowl on his face. Presently he removed a cartridge from his belt, bit out the lead and poured the powder into his hand.

"Now, young feller," he said, "you'll probably raise a rumpus."

So he held the cub's head down with one knee while he emptied the powder into the open cut and lighted it. There was a flash, a smell of burned hair, and a grunt. But the wound was seared and blood no longer flowed from it.

"There. I reckon that'll fix you."

Rosey looked about for a place in which to put his patient, intending to care for the cub along with his other duties of riding the north fence.

On glancing beyond the boulders where the bear had stopped he saw that they stood guard over the mouth of a natural cave. Landslides and rock from above had nearly blocked the opening, but there was still room for a man to enter.

Into this retreat he put the cub and stood looking down into the pen with a quizzical smile playing over his face.

"I think," he said, "I'll just call you Ginger, 'cause you don't quite look like a cinnamon bear."

Ginger whimpered, running his tongue over the edge of his mouth.

"Thirsty? Well, stick around, I'll get you a drink."

Rosey returned to his horse, led it to the fallen tree, and carried his canteen up to the cave.

It was not until he had given Ginger some water, filling a hollow in the rock ledge, and was making his way back to the horse, that he noticed a peculiar thing about the dead tree. Strands of fence wire were holding it in place, as if it had been felled and tied there for the purpose of hiding something.

Then he saw that the runway upon which he stood was actually a trail—a man-made one. Closer scrutiny showed white scars where steel-shod feet had slipped on the rock surface.

Rosey looked up the trail and calculated the destination of its upward course.

"Straight to Big Smoky," he decided, "or I'm not Robin Hood!"

All thought of riding farther on the north fence was banished with the discovery of this blind trail. He went to one end of the dead tree and dragged it aside. Then, mounting his horse, he started up the cañon side.

The way was not so well defined as it climbed higher into the wooded slope, but occasional hoof-marks made trail enough. Before he had gone half a mile, the dim light of dusk made further progress impossible. The afternoon had slipped by unnoticed, until now, deep in the mountain folds, darkness came rapidly.

Rosey had stopped at the base of a giant pine, seeking to pick up the trail that apparently had turned, when simultaneously, with a snap like the breaking of a dead branch, his horse lifted its head, ears thrust forward.

Too late he reached to clamp his hand over the animal's muzzle; a friendly whinny had already been given and, from up the path, an answer received.

Peering from behind the tree trunk that

sheltered him, Rosey caught the flash of a white-rumped horse, wheeling, its rider urging a retreat up the trail. The figure was indistinct in the dim light. Rosey had seen only its back, but it was a broad-shouldered stockiness that seemed familiar.

A picture came back to his mind; a hotel lobby in which a man stood with his back to the door, clutching a girl's arm. Rosey was not sure he had just seen Hank Monk; there were many broad shoulders in the range country, but he would know that horse. White rumps with black tails were scarce.

Eagerly he turned back toward the Double Cross, wanting to be on hand when Hank Monk rode in. This blind trail, he decided at first, would be a short cut from the mines on Big Smoky to the ranch. Then further study convinced him that it must be the only way down that slope of the mountain, for on each side of the ridge up which it climbed were jagged cliffs where even trees found scant footing.

He was certain that the man above had not seen him, but had fled at the sound of the horse's call. Perhaps, if it was Hank Monk, he would not risk the trail again and would take the road through Banning instead. That would make him late getting back to the ranch-house—and be proof enough.

Rosey felt a little pleased with himself as he summed up these conclusions. Not bad—even for Robin Hood!

He stopped near the cave at the foot of the trail, found that Ginger was asleep and rode on. In the cañon bottom he replaced the dead tree and covered up his tracks with dry sand.

As he continued down the stream-bed he became aware of a far-off droning, like the buzzing of bees, a sound that came and went, louder at times then ceasing entirely. He was not yet half-way to the north fence trail when from behind and above him there came again the strange hum, steadily now, growing until it seemed like the roar of Banning's car. Then it stopped, cut short, Rosey thought, as if by the turn of a switch.

He drew in his horse and sat gazing up into the lighted streak of sky between the cañon banks.

In place of the droning, another sound was in the air, a swish like a low-flying buzzard. Then Rosey saw it—a gray-winged bird that seemed to leap from a mesa half-hidden on the slope of Big Smoky, and came swooping down the cañon, gliding with the descent of the cut, its motor silent.

The horse snorted; backed into the trees. Rosey held him. The airplane flashed overhead, swept through a notch in the cañon side and was gone.

Several minutes later Rosey heard the muffled roar of its motor somewhere deep in the hills. Again the sound was a mere drone that he knew could not be heard beyond the first line of ridges.

"Sure beats the ——," he exclaimed, continuing on his way. "Wonder if I'll have to sprout wings too!"

Of course, he argued, that ship might be one of those used by the forestry service to locate fires and such. But why was it sneaking down the cañon with its motor cut off. Looked bad—that did. He wondered if Dave Banning knew about it.

His interest shifted again to the white-rumped horse, and he kept close watch of the trail behind. But around him nothing moved; there was no sound save the scamper of small life aroused by the coming of night.

Beyond the shadows of the hills daylight still flooded the flats of Banning Valley.

As he came out of the cañon to where its walls spread wide apart, Rosey saw a figure riding crazily over the broad floor between him and the cottonwoods around the Double Cross. The horse, a sleek sorrel, was being put through all the tricks of a circus mount.

Touching the spurs to his own horse, Rosey drew nearer and recognized the rider as Fay Banning.

"Plumb loco!" was his verdict.

But as he stopped and sat watching the girl this changed to open admiration, for here was an exhibition of horsemanship that warmed his soul.

Fay rode with the ease of one born to the leather; the grace of a vaquero, with a reckless abandon attained only through years of practise, that was at the same time the greatest evidence of skill. She could do everything—including a hand-turn both left and right—gripping the pommel, swinging to the ground, then over her horse to the other side and bounding back to the saddle—all done in perfect rhythm to the loping of her horse, apparently without effort.

At a run she could pick a pebble from the ground, throw it ahead of her and scoop it up again before it had stopped rolling. She could ride in any position; forked, sidewise, kneeling or standing. Altogether it was the best show Rosey had ever seen.

As he watched Fay his admiration for her riding slowly turned to the girl herself. Certainly she was pretty. She was bareheaded, and her bobbed black hair danced in the rush of wind and fell hiding her face on the quick turns of her play. Rosey praised the lithe limbs and supple body of the horse and thought the girl even better built.

Apparently having tired of her game, she seemed to notice him for the first time and cantered over to where he had stopped.

Rosey's face beamed in the friendliness of the smile that was her greeting. He removed his hat and swept it low in gallant tribute.

"To the queen of the circus!" he exclaimed. "You're a peach—of a rider, I mean. You put a poor cowhand to shame."

Fay laughed.

"I'm not so good as all that, but I love it! Don't you?"

"Sure," said Rosey. "Were you practising up for Barnum and Bailey?"

"No; for 'Bat' Holliday's whoop-up."

"Who and what's that?"

"You don't know Bat Holliday? Of course not, you're a stranger here. Bat's an old-timer who came into the valley just after dad. He's an old dear! He owns the Bug-in-a-Box ranch twenty miles south of us. Guess he used to get pretty lonesome, so a long time ago he started giving a barbecue at his place every Spring just before round-up time.

"All the ranchmen got together, talked over market conditions, planned on shipping their stuff, and all that. Cowpunchers came for the fun of it and hired out to ranchers needing extra help for their round-ups. Women went because the men did.

"By now Bat Holliday's whoop-up has become a regular institution. It's grown too. Besides the barbecue he has riding-contests, shooting and dancing. Do you like to dance?"

Rosey grinned.

"With some folks."

"You're going? Every one in the valley will be there."

"I hadn't figured on it." Rosey hesitated, then his face flushed as he added, "I might, if I had some one to show me the road."

"Oh, it isn't as far as all that," the girl retorted gayly. "Even I can find the way —alone."

"You going alone tomorrow?"

"Yep. I hate dad's gas wagon!"

Rosey was on the point of asking what was the matter with Hank Monk, but instead he blurted out—

"Let's make a pair of it!"

"Suits me," said Fay. "You might do some riding yourself when we get there, if you'd like to try for the finest horse in the world."

"Who's that?"

"Kyber King. A big black, an outlaw as wild and mean as a cage full of lions, but there'll be no greater animal anywhere, if a man can tame him. Hank Monk caught him a year ago; stalked the boy for six months before he landed him. Then one night he got in a poker game, put up Kyber King and lost to one of Bat's men. But no one has been able to stick him; he half-killed most of the Bug-in-a-Box outfit, so he's to be put up tomorrow as the grand prize. Believe me, cowboy, it's going to be a show!"

"Will Monk be there?"

"Of course. Hank's boasted all over the valley to ride Kyber King and break him."

"Sounds good," was Rosey's casual reply, but even now his blood was running hot.

He could already feel the twisting, plunging body of Kyber King beneath him; hear the outlaw's maddened squeal, the shouts of men, and see at last the great animal submitting to his will. There was a horse to his liking—a king for a knight!

Fay went with him as he rode on toward the Double Cross. So interested had he been in the girl that thoughts of the days' discoveries had slipped from his mind. Now he scanned the flat cañon around the ranch and the hills back toward Big Smoky.

"What's the shortest way between here and the mines up yonder?" he asked.

"The road through Banning." Fay looked at him sharply. "Why?"

"Just wondered."

They had reached the lane through the cottonwoods and were riding down it when Rosey, glancing ahead, suddenly tensed.

"What's the matter—see a ghost?" Fay asked.

Rosey grinned, but it was an effort. In front of one of the bunk-shacks stood Hank Monk, lazily puffing smoke into the night air.

"Wrong again," thought Rosey.

But the familiar squareness of Monk's shoulders haunted him.

As he approached the bunk-house with Fay, he noticed a change that had come over the girl, and in his saner moment, when he was not under the spell of her smile, he discovered the reason why she was not going to the whoop-up with Hank Monk.

Quite evidently there had been a row between them. Fay seemed to be flaunting the fact that she was with another man. Sneering, Monk looked the other way as they rode by.

At the stable where Fay kept the sorrel, Rosey bade her good night, promising an early start the next morning, then hurried on to corrals that held the mounts of the hired hands. A picture of a certain animal was vivid in his mind.

Hardly had he reached the fence-gate when he saw it—white rump, black tail; unmistakably the same.

After dragging the saddle from his own and turning him out, Rosey crossed to the other one and felt of its sides. The animal had been ridden recently, that was evident, but it was not hot; there was nothing to show that it had made the impossible run from Big Smoky by way of Banning.

For some time Rosey stood picturing again the country through which he had just ridden. He had come directly from the blind trail, by the shortest route. Even had Hank Monk followed him down they would have passed somewhere in the open cañon around the Double Cross. There had been no sign of him; yet Monk was back, and here was the horse.

"Old White-Rump," said Rosey, running his hand between the animal's ears. "I sure wish you could tell me where you've been!"

CHAPTER V.

BAT HOLLIDAY'S WHOOP-UP.

TO ROSEY, the twenty-mile ride to the Bug-in-a-Box was both revealing and puzzling. It revealed in Fay Banning as good a pal as a man could want. She had been given her own way by a father who had tried to bridge the wants of a motherless child; but at the same time he had instilled in her all the strength and straightforwardness of his own character. And, raised in the rangeland, she had perfect understanding of the men and life around her that had been made even broader by education outside.

The fact that she was the daughter of Dave Banning, revered patriarch of Banning Valley, seemed to make no more difference to her than it did to the old man himself. Rosey felt at home with her; for despite his rough exterior and apparent disinterest in white-collared things he did appreciate in other people the book-knowledge that was lacking in himself.

What puzzled him was the girl's interest in Hank Monk. Their hot words in the hotel that night came again to his ears. Monk must be holding something over her. Yet she didn't seem like the sort who would cover up anything; she'd fight her battles in the open. Must be something more, Rosey decided, and rode along chatting with Fay about the whoop-up.

They had started just after daybreak in order to reach the Holliday ranch and rest up before the afternoon contests. The barbecue and dancing would come in the evening, and they would probably get back to the Double Cross around sun-up of the next day. They rode leisurely, Fay saving her sorrel for the riding events; Rosey in no hurry to end the fun he was getting out of the trip.

As the sun came over the hills, the cool mist of early morning vanished and the heat of day flooded down upon them.

When they were half-way across the valley they could see dust clouds rising from other roads and trails along the floor, all converging toward a common point under the slope of the southern hills.

"Folks horseback and driving have to start early," said Fay. "Those with cars wait until after dinner. That's what dad will do."

"How about Monk?"

"I don't know. He'll get there all right."

"Been your dad's foreman a long time, hasn't he?"

"About five years."

They were riding abreast, almost knee to knee. Rosey turned to the girl, laughing.

"Monk likes you some, I'll bet!"

Fay flushed, but the expression of her face was cold.

"Now look here, cowboy," she said. "Don't get personal. You might spoil a good time."

After that, conversation lagged, and Rosey kicked himself for a blundering fool. Toward noon they stopped under a clump of desert willow growing near a water-hole, to eat the lunch Quong Lung had packed in their saddle-bags.

Stretched in the shade, Rosey marveled at the fare which Fay spread out.

"That old chink won't let you starve," he observed, as the girl uncovered sandwiches, cold meat, rice cakes and fruit enough for three ranch-hands.

"I should say not. Quong Lung's a jewel. He's been my nurse ever since I was next to nothing, and he would do anything for me now."

It was not long before other parties began to string by, following along the road to the Bug-in-a-Box. Cowhands in groups or pairs, dressed in holiday attire of light shirts and blue overalls tucked into high-topped boots that had been polished until they gleamed like gun metal. Their horses were sleeked for the show.

Then came families in buckboards or spring wagons; old men hunched over the lines, saying nothing; wives with babes in their arms; children stuffed in wherever there was room.

Half a dozen Mexicans trotted past, their scrawny, overridden horses dragging rolls of dust from the road. The men themselves formed an unkempt gang, dressed in ragged cotton shirts that still held their flaming colors of red or pink or yellow; strange contrasts to the dark, sullen faces above.

They glared at Rosey in passing, then turned to mutter among themselves.

"Where are they from?" he asked.

"Around town, mostly. Always on hand for a free meal. That squat, slouchy one leading is called Duarte. He's from the mines."

"Thought I recognized him—saw him in town with Hotfoot Hayes." Rosey spoke with a carelessness that was far from what he felt. "Will Hotfoot be around?"

"I don't think so. He isn't very popular."

A little later Rosey heard the drone of a motor and looked down the road, thinking it might be Banning's car. But it was another that swept by, a new one of expensive make, enclosed with drawn curtains.

As it passed he caught only a glimpse of a heavyset, loose-jowled man driving, a black hat concealing most of his face. When the car had disappeared over a hump in the road, he turned back to Fay and saw that she, too had been watching; a set frown over her eyes.

"Who was that?" he asked.

"Jay Kelley."

"Shouldn't think a bartender would be interested in a cowman's party!"

Fay ignored the remark.

"Shan't we go on?" she asked.

A crowd had already gathered by the time they neared the Bug-in-a-Box. Riding up the road which led between wire fences to the ranch-house and corrals, Rosey studied the place.

It was situated somewhat like the Double Cross, except that the hills around it were mere round-tops instead of rugged, and were covered only by sparse growth of scrub-oak and grass. In the gulch directly back of the barns grew a denser thicket of cottonwood and alder.

At one side of the corrals was a high board fence enclosing half an acre or more—the breaking pen where most of the riding would be done.

Even now the top of this fence was draped with figures watching a group of cowhands who seemed to be staging a preliminary contest of their own.

Approaching the ranch-house, Rosey could see throngs of girls and women, all in Summer white or blue, sitting on the veranda, under trees, anywhere they could find shade and comfort. Some had brought their mending and sat talking as they worked; most of them just talked.

Around behind the great adobe house was the main attraction for the boys and many of the younger girls. Over a long pit out of which rose the heat and flame of a log fire a quartered beef was strung on steel rods. Near by, on an iron grating, were piles of steaks ready for broiling.

Ruler of this cook-hole, a white-aproned individual prodded the beef with a hay fork, turning juicy chunks above the pit, all the while yelling good-naturedly to the flock of children around him.

Rosey grinned as he watched a boy sneak a piece of brown meat from the grating, dodge the cook's grasp and run toward the barn, followed by a dozen others.

As soon as Fay Banning was recognized from the house, a flutter of girls claimed her. Rosey suffered his introduction all around, then slipped from the party.

"Probably won't see you until after the riding, will I?" he said to Fay.

"I suppose not. We'll both be busy; you'll try for Kyber King?"

"I aim to."

"Well, good luck. Don't forget the dance —if you're able!"

Rosey took her horse and his, tied them to a rack, then wandered about the place admiring the well-kept outfit of the Bug-in-a-Box. He looked for Duarte and his Mexican followers, but they were not in sight. Neither was the big car driven by Jay Kelley. He noticed that the tree-filled gulch back of the barns claimed frequent visitors, but thought little of it at the time for a sudden war-whoop from the lane attracted his attention.

He turned to see a horse racing into the open area, the rider pulling it back on its haunches in a cruel, showy stop. Hank Monk had arrived.

Evidently he was popular with many of the cowhands present, for he was soon surrounded by a hand-shaking, back-slapping group as he swaggered across the barn lot to put up his horse.

Rosey was beginning to feel conspicuous in being alone, when he saw Dave Banning drive in and park his car with the others. He went over to meet the ranchman.

"Hi, Sir Robin," Banning greeted him. "Have you strayed from the herd?"

"Just sort of grazin' by myself—haven't got acquainted with the gang yet."

"Well, come along. You'd like to meet Bat Holliday."

In a vine-covered patio behind the house they found the owner of the Bug-in-a-Box. First sight of the man was enough to convince Rosey that he and Dave Banning made a pair. In looks they might have been brothers; the most noticeable difference being that Holliday was tall of stature while Banning was but medium build.

The warm greeting between the two men showed what deep regard each held for the other. Then Banning turned to Rosey, saying:

"Bat, this is Robin Hood. He's riding my north fence now."

Holliday laughed.

"Glad to know you. Seems to me you wear an old-time name."

Rosey grinned in return.

"I reckon it'll do."

He thought he saw knowing glances pass between the two ranchmen; he was certain of it, when, within five minutes, Bat Holliday was talking as freely as if the three had been friends for years.

They were seated beside a long table covered with potted flowers, and from this retreat behind the grape-vines of the patio, they could see most of the ranch-buildings and, what seemed of more interest, the gulch behind.

A serious expression had come over Bat Holliday's naturally humorous face.

"Dave," he said, "this is my last whoop-up."

Banning stared across at him. "What's the trouble?"

"Bootleggers. Look out there." Holliday swept his hand toward the back gulch. "The last two times it's been the same. They run a bunch of stuff in here and prey on my guests. Some day, sure as ——, the law will raid the place and I'll be in for it along with the gang, because I've harbored 'em."

The old man paused. All three sat watching a string of men pass into the trees like ants to a sugar barrel.

"It's rotten business," Holliday continued. "Not that I didn't like a nip myself in the old days, and do yet. But a law's a law. All my life I've been fighting lawbreakers—cattle-thieves and the like—and sometimes I've had help from the State in doing it. What sort of a man would I be if I turned lawbreaker now?

"It isn't a question of whether I'm in favor of prohibition or not; as long as the thing stands on the books, I'll uphold it!"

There was a moment of silence. Rosey thought of the times he had scoffed at the dry law; then he realized what a genuine truth Bat Holliday had just stated.

"Who runs the stuff in here?" he asked.

"I don't know, exactly," Bat replied, "because I've never interfered. My doors are open to the valley and when I play host I don't question my guests. Some Mexicans seem to do the actual peddling, but I wouldn't wonder if Jay Kelley was behind the game. Jay's driving a mighty fine car these days, for a man who has nothing but a soft drink stand in a cow-town, and I know you can get bonded whisky at his place now and then. It must come up from Mexico, and yet I thought the bootleg trail was cleaned out last year."

Rosey had a hunch. "Couldn't they fly it in?" he asked.

Both ranchmen smiled. "You're sort of up-to-date, aren't you?" said Bat.

Rosey grinned and kept his thoughts to himself, not the least of which concerned a gray-winged bird that had leaped from a mesa on Big Smoky to glide with silenced motor until it reached the concealment of high cañon walls.

From the open space in front of the house came a sudden chorus of yells, girls' voices, the tattoo of running horses; then the bellow of a cowhand announcing through a newspaper megaphone—

"All entrants for the women's fancy riding, this way!"

"Let's go," said Holliday, standing up. "The show's on."

CHAPTER VI

KYBER KING

APART from the common herd, proud, lordly, yet quivering with the rush of excitement around him, stood one participant in that day's events who sensed beyond all others the fiery, pulsating thrill of battle.

With ears back, muzzle thrust into the dust-laden air, Kyber King looked through the boards that penned him and scornfully watched the antics of others of his kind; weaklings, submitting to the insult of upright figures on their backs.

He snorted; whirled once around the confines of his prison, the sunlight rippling in the silken sheen of his jet-black coat. Stopping again, he continued his survey of the galloping, prancing band.

The smell of his kind, tinged with the odor of man, brought strange pictures before his eyes; hills wherein he was limited only by the endurance of his own hardened strength; where battles had been waged and won, until all others bowed to his leadership; where man was but a puny thing to be easily outdistanced, outwitted and outfought.

Came visions of the day when, lured into a box cañon by a sorrel mare, he had suddenly heard a sharp crack, like a tree-limb breaking in a storm, and with that a blow from something unseen.

Then darkness lifted, and there was a rope around his neck. A heavy broad man leered at him from the end of it.

"Got you, my beauty, at last. Now we'll see who is king!"

Kyber remembered that voice; how often in the days that followed had he heard it, his hatred flaring at the sound, as he had fought an endless combat of muscle against the cruelty and cunning of his captor.

The scene changed—the crowd of figures was shifting now to the board fence near his pen. Some were climbing to the top of it, peering down at him. He ignored them, except for a flattening of his ears.

Soon the larger corral was filled with clouds of dust, the yells of men, and the twisting shapes of his kin. Motionless he watched, chafing to be out there with them, showing them tricks that only a veteran would know.

One by one he saw men ride and win; then ride again until they were hurled to defeat, none able to stick with the preliminary animals that would give them a chance at the King.

Then came one who rode the line in quick succession. Shouts of, "Bravo, Monk!" roared in the corral, and Kyber King saw a heavy figure and heard a voice that he had learned to hate.

He tore at the ground beneath him, circled the pen, stopped. Another was riding; one who carried no lash that cut or dug raw sores with points on his feet. Yet he rode the string as the first had done. Kyber King stood with ears cocked forward as he watched this tall figure play his game. At the end there came just one deep voice.

"Good work, Robin Hood!"

With that there was a surge of men toward his pen. Two of them stood by the gate while one threw a rope around his neck. He stayed fast in his tracks; experience had taught him it was useless to fight the thing that was next tossed upon his back.

Then he was led into open ground and a hood held over his eyes. Something tightened around his body. A weight descended. He cringed and his muscles grew taut as, even before the hood was jerked from his eyes, he recognized that weight; the certain pressure of the man's legs, the pull on his mouth, then the pain of teeth raked along his sides.

All the old hatred surged back upon him; he knew but one seething instinct—fight to kill. With the spring of a cat he flung himself into the open space, straight toward the fence beyond. Near it, a blow on his head sent him careening, blinded, off in another direction.

Throwing all the strength, all the cunning and trickery of a life on the range into his next move, he whirled and shot down the length of the corral, plunging, kicking, pivoting at every step, goaded on by a lash that cut ribbons of blood on his rump and flanks.

Twice he made this circuit of the board fence. The man clung to him. Back in the center he paused, drawing his breath for the last effort. He heard the man laugh, and with that hated sound in his ears he launched his body into the air, rearing upon his hind legs until it seemed that his balance had gone.

He felt the weight shift on his back as the man slipped one foot from the stirrup. In that instant he leaped end for end, rump up, head down, threw his body forward, shooting from beneath the man who seemed left in mid air.

He heard the thud of a body on the ground behind him, and he whirled back to kill the fallen foe. But another horse and rider leaped between them. Strong hands jerked him back toward his pen.

There he stood, his sides heaving, the fire to kill blazing in his blood-shot eyes. For several minutes he was allowed to rest, then again the figures approached.

To his maddened senses all men were alike; things to be crushed, trampled into the earth. So with another upon his back he threw all the rush of his first fight into this second.

But gradually there came the knowledge of something different. There was no cutting along his sides, no lash upon his flank, and at the end of each heartbreaking attempt to throw the man there came a voice that soothed the tension of his hate.

Stopping a moment to relieve the pain of his labored breath, he felt the warmth of a hand upon him. He cringed, his muscles quivering, but the hand moved slowly, rubbing the aching cords along his neck. Again came the voice, softly:

"Ease up old boy. That's it."

He gathered himself for another spring, yet the hand seemed to hold him, pulling gently back on the steel in his mouth. He took a step forward, the hand patted him on, guiding him around the fence, through an open gate and out beyond the ranks of hated men.

Some time later, under a tree on the slope of the hills, he stopped. The man descended, and there, alone in the dusk of evening, they talked to each other and understood.

Over chunks of juicy brown meat at the barbecue that night Robin Hood of the Double Cross was heralded a breaker of kings. But on the starlit hillside above, standing with head held high, proud, lordly as ever, Kyber King knew otherwise. He had but yielded the fight to a friend.

CHAPTER VII

THE "LAW."

AT THE dance after the barbecue Rosey found himself a hero. Girls gushed their praise of his riding as he whirled them down the length of the big living-room, cleared of rugs and furniture for the occasion. Men spoke to him as if they were old-time friends.

Over on one side, under a hanging oil-lamp, an accordion wheezed, a violin scraped, a banjo plunked, and somehow music was the result. Every one else seemed happy; Rosey was not.

He had danced the first waltz with Fay; then she had passed him on to other girls. After that he had seen her only once or twice, talking with some one else, until now, near midnight, she was nowhere in the room; nor had she been for the last half-hour.

It was then that Rosey realized that he had not seen Hank Monk all evening. Mechanically he went through the steps of the dance, his mind on other things. When it was finished and he was relieved of his partner, he slipped out the back way into the patio where he had talked with Bat and Dave that afternoon.

Standing sheltered behind the vines he watched the movements of many figures, dimly revealed by lanterns hung in the trees and on ropes stretched between the buildings. Evidence of frequent trips to the back gulch was plentiful among the cowhands. Some had just reached the song-and-swagger stage; others had passed beyond it and were sprawled under wagons or wherever sleep had overtaken them.

Rosey turned to scan the tie-rack and noticed that there had already been considerable thinning among the horses. Suddenly the sweep of his gaze halted. Fay Banning's sorrel was not where he had seen it earlier in the evening.

A moment longer he stood surveying the yard, thinking that the girl might have moved her horse to other parts. It was nowhere in sight. Rosey hesitated; perhaps this was none of his business, but he had brought Fay and it would be his business if anything should happen.

Leaving the patio, he walked into the shadows of the trees, made his way toward the hill back of the ranch-buildings and climbed to where he had left Kyber King. The slope was dark, save for dim starlight that turned the hills and cañons into a strange country of gray ridges creased with black.

When he approached Kyber King, the horse snorted and drew back to the end of his tie rope.

"That's all right, old boy," Rosey said softly. "Want to go from here?"

As he tightened the cinch of his saddle he noticed that from the elevation of the hillside he could look across the ridges bordering the tree-filled gulch, which was now directly below, and faintly see the flat land of the valley-floor beyond.

Down there something was moving; like the dimmed lights of two cars slowly following along an unfamiliar road. Presently they halted. The lights vanished. A little later, along the skyline of the opposite ridge, came the forms of several men, too closely grouped to be counted. The next moment they were gone, creeping down, Rosey knew, into the gulch.

Leading his horse, he descended until he could see the flicker of lights beneath the trees. A jumble of voices drifted up; hoarse laughter, and the blustering of drunken men.

Hardly had Rosey reached his vantage point and stopped, when from below came a sudden crashing in the underbrush, then a volley of shots. With that, fury broke loose in the gulch; a stampede like the rush of terrified cattle, the babble of Mexicans, white men cursing, and above all the command:

"Halt! In the name of the law!"

That had its effect. The gulch seemed surrounded, except for the side toward the hills. Some of the commotion ceased, but there still came the sound of running horses, headed, Rosey suddenly realized, straight up the cowpath upon which he stood.

It was not until the riders had approached to within fifty yards that he saw them and was seen. A gun flashed. Rosey jerked back from the whine of a bullet glancing from the rocks beside him. Then he saw the figures whirl, forcing their mounts up the hillside and circling back toward a deeper ravine that would lead out of the hills some distance behind the ranch-house.

Until that shot Rosey had only been a spectator to the raid. Now his interest was personal.

Leaping upon Kyber King, he raced up the slope, turned on top of the ridge and soon found himself following down a wagon road that hugged the bank of the ravine.

From the darkness ahead came the tattoo of fleeing horses, growing louder as Kyber King closed the gap between them.

Near a curve in the road Rosey caught a glimpse of two figures. Then the bank shut them off, and when he rounded the bend a few minutes later, he saw only one. He touched Kyber King. The black leaped into the race, his ears back, neck stretched level with his body, and closed down on the rider ahead.

Rosey drew his gun, leveling it at the flying figure as he called—

"Stop, or I'll bore you!"

The horse was held in. Rosey came abreast, peering across at the face beside him. For a moment he sat speechless, more perplexed than surprized.

"Hello," said Fay Banning lightly. "Out Robin Hooding again?"

Rosey's anger flared.

"I'll make whoever was with you think so!"

Fay laughed.

"Why, you funny boy, can't you see I'm alone?"

"Then I suppose you're the one who took a shot at me!"

The girl did not reply, and in that interval of silence Rosey heard a crash in the brush along the trail behind him, then the rattle of loose rock as a horse slid down the bank into the bottom of the ravine.

Whirling Kyber King, he started in pursuit. A scream from Fay checked him, and, turning, he saw her crumpled on the ground, the sorrel running wildly down the road.

He leaped from his horse and knelt beside the girl.

"My ankle," she cried. "It's broken."

With hurried, clumsy fingers Rosey untied her shoe. There was no swelling of the ankle, nor the least sign of injury.

He looked down into the girl's face. Her eyes met his without wavering, and the pleading look he saw in them smothered the accusation he would have made.

Without a word he helped her up. By this time pursuit of the rider who had fled down the ravine was useless.

"I suppose your horse will go home?" he asked, looking in the direction the sorrel had gone.

"Yes."

"Then let's go back and get the old gray. You can ride him."

When they reached the Bug-in-a-Box they found the place strangely quiet. Fay asked to be left outside the lighted grounds, so Rosey went on alone to get the old gray.

Most of the guests had departed, but a few cowhands stood talking in scattered groups and from these he heard the one remark:

"Bat Holliday's run in. Federal booze agents took him to the jug in Cañon City."

"Did they get any one else?" Rosey asked.

"A few Mexicans."

"Duarte?"

"No."

Rosey went on, found the horse and led him back to Fay. Then together they went down the lane and out toward the Double Cross. There was no conversation between them. They rode apart, often in single-file.

Rosey had been puzzled by the girl's actions before; he was mystified now. He was certain that it was Hank Monk who had been with her and had taken the shot at him. But he was just as sure that whatever Fay's game, it was as square as she could make it. Fay Banning was no sneak! There was only one explanation, Rosey decided—she was into something that had gone beyond her control.

So far he had simply made long guesses at what it was all about; now, since he was being included in the game, he might as well learn the whole truth of it. Here, if ever, was a challenge to Robin Hood.

CHAPTER VIII

BLIND TRAILS

THE first gray of morning was already in the east before they reached the Double Cross. With the horses put up and a few parting words to Fay, Rosey went to the shack where he bunked, kicked off his boots and stretched gratefully upon his blankets.

Sunrise two hours later found him awake again, sitting up, blinking at the light of an open doorway. Then he recognized the figure standing there, and mechanically he reached to pull on his boots.

"Never mind that," said Banning. "You'd better hit the hay a little longer. I just wanted to tell you I'm leaving. Going to Cañon City to get Bat out of jail. I've got influence down there that will fix things in short order, but I won't be back for ten days or so. We'll both stay on for a meeting of the cattle association.

"You'll take orders from Monk while I'm gone. The round-up gang will be here in a few days, and he'll probably take you off the north fence and use you in that. Remember, Monk's the boss." Banning smiled. "Try to get along. I'll be back before the herd is all brought in."

Rosey yawned and continued the process of dressing.

"Do you figure to check up the stuff this time?"

"No. My bunch isn't short, I know that. Valentine got the same idea when he was on the job you have—swore I was short considerable. So I took a count at the Fall round-up, and found there was nothing to it."

"Then right after that," Rosey added, "Valentine was found dead up on Big Smoky. Yes?"

Banning frowned. "I don't believe there was any connection. Val probably had a run-in with the bootleggers. Anyhow, the fact stands—actual count showed my herd was not short."

Rosey shrugged and said no more. Banning left the bunk-house and a little later the roar of his motor told he was on his way to catch the train for Cañon City.

Before three days had passed, Rosey

was convinced that Hank Monk was taking every advantage of Banning's absence.

In the first place the round-up gang, which the ranchman had said would be there "in a few days," came the next evening.

The Double Cross followed the system familiar to most of the smaller fenced ranches. Not supporting enough hands regularly to take care of the round-up each Spring and Fall, Banning hired a gang that did nothing but go from one outfit to another during these periods of the year.

Rosey looked with digust upon the mob that flocked into the Double Cross, as a dozen Mexicans came riding up the cottonwood lane, herding their meager string of horses before them. They were good hands and skilled riders, but cruel to their mounts, of which each man had only two or three that he would ride to death in a season, trading for fresh ones next year if he could not steal them.

Behind the horsemen came a caravan of rusty, rattling flivvers; old men driving, the backs of the cars filled with fat women and squawling babies. And around the whole procession romped a pack of mangy curs.

The whole outfit went into camp down by the corrals, the women cooking a supper of chili and tortillas over an open fire, the men lounging on saddles thrown to the ground, smoking and talking.

After nightfall Rosey saw Hank Monk go down and jabber with the Mexicans in their own tongue.

The foreman's game seemed clear enough. With so large a gang he could run the round-up through in less than a week—the cattle would be bunched and spread out again before Banning returned. Rosey knew well enough why Monk wanted this to be so, and he went to sleep that night wondering just where he was to come in.

The next morning he found he was not to come in at all.

"You'd better pack your stuff to the line-house," Monk told him. "Got a corral to build. The timber is already cut, but you'll split your own posts. I reckon you'll be gone about a week, so take plenty of grub."

"You don't figure to use me on the herd?" Rosey asked.

"Fence-riders," Monk sneered, "ain't never used in a round-up. Not while I'm boss!"

Conflicting thoughts surged in Rosey's mind as he packed his few belongings in a blanket-roll. He had hoped, somehow, to convince Dave Banning to take another count at the round-up. But that now seemed impossible; for the ranchman would be back too late.

Rosey kicked his blanket-roll out the bunk-house door, then ambled around to the cook shack to get his grub-pile from Quong Lung. He also begged a chunk of meat for Ginger. He had made two trips to the cave, stopping each morning that he had taken up his course along the north fence, and had found the cub more friendly with each visit.

It was still early morning when he strapped his pack on Kyber King, swung into the saddle and headed for the hills.

Intending to leave the meat in Ginger's cave before going on to the line-house, he had passed up the cañon behind the ranch buildings, and was following the crest of the lower ridges that lay between the mountains and the flatland, when he saw a bunch of cattle going at a run into the mouth of a ravine.

There was no one behind them, yet they were loping through the high brush as if driven by a fantom rider.

He kept Kyber King under cover of the juniper and scrub-oak, turned along an intersecting ridge and rode parallel to the ravine into which the cattle had disappeared. It was not until he came almost above the animals that he saw a large black dog was driving them. It looked like an ordinary Mexican cur, but it herded the cattle into the ravine with the skill of an old cow-hand.

As Rosey stopped and sat watching the game below he noticed that the dog would work on the herd for several minutes, then trot into the trees on the opposite slope of the cut, out of which it would return a little later to send the cattle off on a run, always working them farther into the hills.

Searching that other bank, he fixed the spot where the dog disappeared and moved his horse to get a better view of a small clearing. Then, almost at the same instant that he saw the figure of a horseman, the man saw him. A rifle-barrel glinted in the sunlight, and a wisp of smoke rose from the cleared patch. Rosey jerked Kyber King back into a shield of brush, answering the shot with two from his .44.

When he again came in view of the opposite bank he saw the other man urging his horse to the top of the ridge behind. He could see only the fugitive's back until, close to the crest, the man turned, whistling to the dog. The sun fell full upon his dark face, and Rosey recognized the Mexican Duarte.

Here was luck. If the Mexican had come down from Big Smoky to rustle cattle he must have some place to hide them, and now, surprized in the act, he would head back to that cover. Confident that Kyber King could soon overtake Duarte's hill-worn gray, Rosey jumped the black down into the ravine and sent him climbing up the Mexican's trail.

Part-way up the slope he drew the horse in and leaned from the saddle, scooping a brass shell from the bare spot where Duarte had stood.

Riding on, he searched in his trouser pocket, found two other empty shells and drew them out. The three were alike—UMC .38's—revolver shells shot with a rifle. Rosey's eyes narrowed as he stared at this evidence. Duarte was the man who had killed old Buck.

As he crossed on top of the ridge he looked over into another cañon, deeper than the ravine out of which he had climbed, and caught a glimpse of Duarte fleeing along the course of a dry stream-bed.

He followed down. There he could no longer see the Mexican, but on both sides of the cut were impassable walls of brush and rock; the only way out was up the cañon. As Kyber King leaped into the race Rosey loosened the gun in his holster and stared ahead, expecting each curve in the stream-bed to bring his man in sight.

A mile passed. The cañon banks drew close together, and presently rose in sheer rock cliffs on either side. Five minutes later Rosey pulled Kyber King to an abrupt halt.

The cañon was boxed. In front of him it ended in a bulkhead of solid rock some fifty feet high, barren, unscalable, boasting not so much as a hole out of which a coyote could escape. Wheeling his horse, Rosey rode back the way he had come, searching for a possible break in the rock and brush of the cañonside; anywhere Duarte could have passed. There was none.

Again at his starting-point, Rosey gave up the hunt, climbed out of the ravine where he had climbed down, then continued on his way to the north fence and Ginger.

An hour later he left Kyber King in a secluded spot near the blind trail and went up to the cave afoot. Even before he reached the entrance he missed the fuzzy brown head and the black eyes that had peered over the rocks at him on his previous visits. But as he stopped in front of the cave-mouth he heard a scrambling from within, and Ginger's short whine.

He whistled. There was no reply. He threw down a scrap of the meat he had brought.

"Come and get it, you little runt!"

The only sound was a questioning sniff from deeper within the black depths. Tearing away the rocks that he had placed in front of the hole, Rosey stooped and walked into the opening. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he saw that the cave, instead of being but a short rift in the mountainside, continued back and soon became large enough that he might stand erect. Nor was that the end.

He returned to the entrance, picked a handful of dry sticks and used them for a torch as he continued his exploration of the hole. Ahead he saw the gleam of Ginger's eyes. They retreated, and he followed, calling to the cub.

Within a few paces the jagged rock sides of the cave took on the appearance of squared walls, and presently, turning at a sharp angle, he came upon the timbered drift of a mine.

The torch in his hand burned out. He dropped the loose ends and turned back, groping along the mine walls until he came to the cross-cut that would lead him out into the cave. But upon reaching the corner he found himself peering into a void as black as the tunnel where he stood. The light of his exit seemed to have vanished. Rosey laughed. That was the way with things in this country.

Confident that he would soon locate the cave, he made another torch of splints from the half-rotted mine timbers and held it close to the floor looking for his tracks to guide him out.

He found them and followed for many minutes along the direction they led; followed until they merged with countless others, old ones and new ones, all looking alike in the dust of the rock floor; and there, confronted by a choice of four yawning tunnel mouths, each leading into the —— alone knew what, he stopped.

The torch again burned low. He dropped the embers and stood staring into the blackness around him, lost, confused—a prisoner of Big Smoky.

CHAPTER IX

A FRAME-UP

AT THE same time that Rosey was groping in the depths of the maze beneath the mountain, another adventurer threaded his way through the clouds above it, jockying his plane in the uneven air-streams while he scowled at a map which told him worse than nothing.

Phil Davis was a new hand in the flying game. From the cockpit of his "Jenny," a Curtis JN4 purchased at auction from a Government field, he surveyed the country that his altimeter said was two thousand feet below, then turned again to his map.

His frown deepened.

"Nothing like it!"

Which indeed was true. By the contours of his map he should be flying over a level valley affording several good places to land. But actual observation showed only high hills and higher peaks and Phil decided his eyes were the more trustworthy.

Yet that did not decrease the urgent need of a place where he could roost. The gasoline gage showed less than two gallons—not much feed for the eight cylinders that kept him up and going.

Even so, Phil was not greatly worried; he rather lived the uncertainty of not knowing what would happen next. That's why he had purchased this old ship that Army airman would no longer fly. Phil was young, had the light hair and daring heart of a viking and was already ready for something different.

Passenger-carrying by air had appealed to him as a more exciting business than being a good automobile mechanic. So he had quit a steady job and bought his ship for a few hundred dollars. Then, supported by a six weeks' course in a commercial flying-school, he had entered the game.

Passengers had been few. Those who did ride with him once never came back a second time. Phil liked too well to try his hand at stunting. No one else shared his conviction that a flying trip was the bunk without half a dozen loops, sideslips, tail-spins and a barrel-roll or two.

Eventually he had been forced to leave his first location when he persisted in chasing automobiles along the county boulevard. So now he was on his way, just anywhere elsewhere, still at peace with himself although lost, out of gas and out of luck.

Ahead of him loomed a smooth-topped dome that stood higher than the others in the mountain range. Closer inspection showed signs of life in one of the cañons that creased its slope; a few small buildings, the fan-tails of ore dumps and ribbons that marked traveled roadways. And higher toward the crest was a broad hollow that looked, from his elevation, like a bite out of a green-skinned apple. Thankfully he realized it was large enough and level enough for a landing.

With his ship nosed down, motor cut off, he circled the mesa searching for the smoothest part as he dropped. The field was short, but he could make it in a pancake fall. Scarcely a hundred yards above the mesa floor he leveled out and was sinking rapidly, when something tore through the fabric of his lower plane. Above the swish of his gliding he heard the sharp report of a gun.

His motor roared to life as he cut in the switch, and pulling back on the stick, he zoomed over the forest of pines that flanked the mesa.

"Keep out!" he muttered, heading away from the forbidden spot. "—— of a way to tell a man."

He glanced at the gasoline gage. It stood at a gallon. But he had swung around the dome of the mountain, and he smiled with relief as he looked down on the other side.

Below him stretched a broad valley. Close under the nose of his ship a group of ranch buildings nestled at the edge of the foot-hills. Beyond that, perhaps ten miles farther along, scattered specks marking the houses of a small town promised gas, food and possibly a few days of business.

He was not yet half-way toward the place when the steady purr of his motor changed to irregular sputtering. White smoke shot from the exhaust, and the ship lost speed. Ahead showed a clearing not far from a road, and into this haven he dropped, bounced over hummocks of sage-brush and settled at last into the sand near the field's edge.

For a few minutes he sat gazing upon the lifeless countryside. Then he took a deep breath and swung his legs over the cockpit of his plane.

"Jenny," he said, "if you weren't a lady I'd bust your —— nose! You lead me into trouble and drop me flat. Just like a woman."

Removing his goggles, he slid to the ground and sat in the shade under one wing of the ship. That town, he reflected, was at least five miles away. He'd not walk it! There was a road, surely some one used it, sometime. So he sat and waited.

Half an hour passed without even a sound of life on the desert trail; then from back toward the mountains came the drone of a motor, and a car swept around the bend.

Phil ran out, waving his arms. The car drew near but the driver, a fat-jowled man, seemed ignorant of the figure by the roadside. He sat looking straight ahead, the car rushed on, and Phil stood choking in the dust.

After relieving his soul of a few cuss-words that suited the retreating car, he decided he'd walk after all. What a —— of a country. First they take shots at you; then they leave you stuck on the desert.

The day was hot, and he took his time; so he had not gone far when he met the same driver coming back. Behind him was another man in a flivver.

Phil stepped to one side of the road to let them pass, but both cars stopped before they reached him. The second man climbed out and stood waiting until he approached.

"Where you headed?" the fellow demanded.

That seemed none of his business. Phil said so. Wasn't this a free country? Or perhaps this valley hadn't heard of George Washington yet. Did they choose their visitors down here the same as they did up in the mountains? Then he saw the gleam of a sheriff's badge, and he felt more respectful. But there was no time for further talk.

"He's the one," said the fat-jowled man. "And there's his airplane. I'll take a look at it."

There was an exchange of glances between the two men.

"Go ahead," the sheriff answered. "I'll take him in."

While the other man drove over to the ship, the sheriff searched Phil's pockets, reading the several letters he found. Then he produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Do you mind telling me what this is all about?" Phil asked.

"You're under arrest."

"Oh. I thought you were just asking me out to tea!" Phil laughed. "Say, come on —what's the game?"

Receiving no reply, he turned to look back at his ship, and stopped, his muscles tense. Jenny was in flames. The other man was already driving into the mountains from whence he had come.

Blind with rage, Phil swung his manacled hands at the sheriff's jaw, jerking away and turning to run to his blazing plane. He saw the man's heavy gun rise over his head; he dodged the blow—and the next moment, it seemed, he was lying on the springs of a narrow cot, gazing through the bars of a cell.

There was the faint consciousness that the lock had just then grated shut, and that he had not been in this position long. Even now he could hear a murmur of retreating voices.

"How long'll we keep 'im, sheriff?" one was asking.

"I don't know. Kelley had me bring him here. It's his say."

A door slammed, cutting off the voices. Phil opened his eyes. He was dazed, and his head throbbed from the blow he had received. For a long time he lay motionless, trying to solve the riddle of the frame-up into which he had fallen.

CHAPTER X

SHADES OF MAVERICKS

THREE hours' wandering in the depths of Big Smoky, groping along by the light of makeshift torches, had convinced Rosey of two things: that the whole mountain was honeycombed with mine tunnels, and that his chances of getting out were next to nothing.

Then, stopping to rest on a ledge of rock, he felt a change in the air about him. It seemed to have turned from cool and damp, to warm. Wetting his finger and holding it up showed that a slight wind was drifting through the tunnel.

With renewed hope he stood up and followed into the movement of air. Frequent wettings of his finger guided him, until presently the breeze was strong enough to blow the flare he carried.

He stopped. From somewhere ahead

came a sound that was familiar; faintly, as if from the other side of the rock wall. Then he caught an odor, unmistakably the smell of burning hide. He crept on, scarcely knowing why he shielded his light, forgetting the hours he had been lost, in his visions of what this discovery might bring.

The odor grew. The sound became louder, distinctly now the bawling of cattle. Then in the darkness ahead he saw a light; flickering, dim, as if seen through a haze of smoke. He dropped his torch and stamped out its flame.

He went on. Soon he saw that the source of the light was not in the hole he followed, but beyond it. What he looked upon was only the reflection that danced on one wall of his tunnel. The other was in a shadow.

Keeping to this darkened side, he moved forward again, groping from one upright timber to the next. These studs, he noticed, were ten inches thick and spaced three feet apart, thus forming recesses where he could hide should any one look into the mouth of the drift.

It was not until he had almost reached the opening that he could see what lay beyond, then he found himself gazing into an enormous cavern. Apparently a cave-in had occurred here at one time, for looking up the opposite wall, which was more than sixty feet high, he saw the twisted ends of mine tracks hanging out of a dark hole that seemed to be a continuation of the bore in which he stood. The great mass of fallen rock had been removed, leaving a room larger than the hay barns on the Double Cross.

On creeping closer to the edge of the tunnel mouth he saw that it was some twenty feet above the cavern floor. But that discovery was of little interest, for his attention was fixed on the scene below.

In the center of the room the dark forms of several cattle milled in the circle of light sent out from a burning log. Two Mexicans were quieting them while two others roped one from the herd and threw it near the fire.

As the animal lay with one flank upturned, Rosey looked down upon a familiar brand—a horizontal line cut by two shorter parallel ones — Dave Banning's Double Cross.

One of the Mexicans jerked an iron from the flames and pressed it down, coughing in the smoke that rose from burning hair and hide. When he lifted it, two more short lines had been added, one at each end of the long horizontal one, and as the animal stood up it carried the old triple H brand of Hotfoot Hayes.

Another was thrown and branded, then another; and Rosey sat watching the game. Clever, he called it, —— clever! Sneak 'em into the mountain and brand 'em there with no chance of being watched—so they thought.

Several mysteries were being cleared in his mind. He knew absolutely now that the Double Cross herd was short, in spite of Banning's assurance. Also, when in a few minutes two more cattle were driven in through a passageway at one side of the room, he knew that a tunnel of the mine must open out somewhere in the lower hills close to the north fence, and by this means the animals were being stolen.

But all that did not explain where they were taken until, as if in answer to his questioning, Rosey heard a rumble from above the cavern. Presently a mine-hoist dropped out of a hole in one corner of the ceiling and bumped to a stop on the floor.

It was an ordinary ore cage, that had been boarded up to make it cow-proof. A man stepped off, and Rosey scowled as Duarte came into the firelight, jabbering angrily to the Mexicans.

Jumping at his command, they threw one of the animals, tied it and dragged it on to the hoist. Duarte got on with it, pulled a signal rope and ascended into the dark hole above.

Rosey grinned. Straight to heaven! With Hotfoot Hayes at the Pearly Gates!

Other trips of the hoist followed the first. One by one Dave Banning's cattle were rebranded with the triple H and sent into the unknown world somewhere above the cavern. Already Rosey was pondering on the problem of following them, determined to learn where they were being taken.

He understood now why he had been stopped from going through Thunder Gap, that first night when his horse was shot. He understood, too, how Hank Monk had reached the Double Cross ahead of him on the evening he had found the blind trail; and how Duarte had vanished. They had passed inside the mountain while he was riding around it.

But the end of the trail was not yet in sight; it pointed up. That was all he knew.

After the hoist had taken away the last bawling cow, the Mexicans kicked out their fire, waited until the cage came back empty, climbed aboard and were gone.

When the rumbling above had ceased, and the mountain was as black and soundless as a crypt, Rosey made another torch, lighted it and climbed down to the cavern floor. There, walking toward the passageway through which he had seen the cattle enter the room, he saw the gray of daylight filtering in at the other end. He went toward it; fresh air blew against his face, warm, laden with the smell of life. Presently he stood behind a screen of leaves and blinked at the sunshine beyond.

One more step carried him through the curtain of sapling willow and into a cañon that was familiar by the fact that its tree-grown banks seemed unpenetrable. Even then, turning in his tracks, he could scarcely recognize the hole he had just left.

He paused only long enough to fix the location in his mind, then climbed out of the cañon and headed back to Kyber King, making his plans as he went. There seemed but one way of following the cattle, and that lay up the blind trail.

When he reached the horse he rested for an hour, eating a much needed meal from his grub pile. Then he cached his blanket-roll in the crotch of a tree and started on.

Having ridden up the blind trail once, he followed it more easily now, and there were fresh hoof-prints to guide him. The day had passed while he was threading the labyrinth below Big Smoky and evening was already darkening the slopes as he approached a point where the trail ceased to climb upward and became more level as it passed through a notch in the ridge.

From somewhere ahead a dog barked. Rosey held Kyber King to a slow walk, and like the flit of a shadow the big black slipped among the pines bordering a broad flat-bottomed hollow that Rosey recognized as the place Banning had called The Park.

Soon the trees thinned out, and from the edge of a clearing he looked across to a group of buildings that nestled on the slope of the mountain, where it started to rise again behind the hollow. They had once marked the mines of Big Smoky, but were now only weatherworn shacks; shaft-houses that had fallen apart, their roofs caved in, the framework of their derricks standing like gaunt skeletons of the past.

But there was one building, apparently the bunk-house, that had been kept in good repair. And apart from the rest a new shack had been built somewhat higher up the slope.

Behind these buildings the mountain rose a hundred feet or more, then was cut off abruptly on a long, level line that seemed to mark the beginning of a mesa. It was upon the growth of trees bordering this flattened area that Rosey's attention was fixed.

From up there came the shouts of men herding cattle, then the bark of dogs. The sounds grew fainter and died away. For half an hour Rosey sat with his eyes upon the heights. The shadows of evening deepened, casting the hollow into a blackness out of which the mountain slope, still bathed in reflected light, rose to meet the reddened sky.

Then out of the trees on that opposite ridge came two horsemen, who rode down and disappeared behind the bunk-house. Behind them came another, the Mexican, Duarte. He did not follow the first two, but stopped beside the house higher up, tied his horse and entered.

Turning Kyber King from the path, Rosey skirted the clearing until he came to a point in the trees not far below the same house. There he left the horse and crept up the slope. A light gleamed from one window of the place. He made his way toward it, slowly, hesitating before passing any figure that loomed dark in the dusk.

Near one corner of the house, he stopped. The sound of voices was coming from the lighted room. He went on, and presently crouched beside the open window. The voices had ceased. Rosey clutched the butt of his gun, loosening it in his holster. Then as the conversation began again he recognized the quick, sneering speech of Hotfoot Hayes and the soft slow reply of Duarte.

"How far did he chase you?" Hayes demanded.

"Up the cañon. That *hombre*, he is a go-devil like the wind!"

"Why in —— didn't you drop him?"

"I shoot to scare. You have never say he is for kill."

"Well, I say it now! Get rid of him—any way. I don't care if you have to go down on the Double Cross to do it. Savvy?"

"*Sí.* Send heem for —— He is too smart *hombre!*"

"Not smart—plain —— fool. But he's

dangerous. Monk says so. How many head did you get in today?"

"Only eight. I have to leave most of them in the cañon when that fool chase me."

There was silence for several minutes. Then Hotfoot spoke again.

"Eight head won't pay for half the stuff I brought back this time. You'll have to go to town in the morning, Duarte. See Kelley and tell him he'll have to pay cash for this load. A thousand dollars. Tell him to bring it here tomorrow night—bring Monk with him and we'll talk this thing over. We won't risk taking any more of the Double Cross cattle until they get rid of that Robin Hood!"

Rosey moved a step back from the window. Here was news. He stood straightening out the facts that had been so suddenly handed to him. Hotfoot Hayes with a load of "stuff"—whisky, of course—trading it to Jay Kelley for a bunch of the Double Cross cattle. Then Hank Monk and Kelley were partners, Monk furnishing Dave Banning's cows while Kelley sold the booze they traded from Hotfoot. Duarte was the go-between.

So much was plain enough. Hotfoot must bring his stuff from Mexico, Rosey decided, thinking again of the airship he had seen come down the slope of Big Smoky. But where did he keep the herd that was re-branded with the triple H? They couldn't be shipped out until that mark had healed and grown old.

Rosey's thoughts engrossed him. He stood with his back to the corner of the house, straining to catch every word from the men within. Utter blackness of night had come. There was no sound, save for the whispering of wind through the trees and the drone of the two voices.

Duarte was talking in his soft, low murmur. Rosey leaned forward to hear. Then a dead leaf rustled. A twig snapped; and his blood ran cold.

He knew something was moving behind him. Slowly he turned his head, expecting at any instant to hear a voice or a shot, or feel the lunge of a man out of the dark.

But the movement had stopped. Then, even in the darkness, he saw the form of a monster black dog, Duarte's, crouching on the ground. The relief he felt passed with the moment; for the dog's white fangs gleamed as it crept forward stealthily.

Rosey drew his gun, gripping the muzzle, vaguely hoping to club the animal without arousing the camp with a shot. Five feet from him the dog leaped straight for his throat, its jaws hanging wide apart.

As with one movement Rosey dodged and struck at the flying body. Almost blind in the darkness, he sent his blow too soon; the fangs clamped upon his wrist, tearing the gun from his hand.

Whirling, he crashed the dog against the house and felt the jaws relax. The animal crouched for another spring, then crumpled to the ground from the blow of his booted foot. A light blazed from an open doorway.

Rosey groped on the ground for the gun he had dropped, missed it and leaped down the slope as Hotfoot and Duarte rushed upon him. Two shots came from the hillside, and with that warning the bunk-house below was alive with men.

"Block the road!" Hayes roared down to them.

Duarte jabbered another command in Mexican. Rosey crashed out of the underbrush and fled to Kyber King. Seconds would count! Already he could hear the drumming of horses hard-ridden across the hollow, their riders racing to block the one road out of the Park.

Leaping on Kyber King, Rosey thought of the blind trail. But in the dark it was useless to try to find that, so he sent his horse straight across the clearing toward the road that he knew cut somewhere down the center of the hollow.

The pounding of horses drew nearer, then he saw a ribbon of white and swung upon it, heading away from the approaching sound. He touched Kyber King's neck. The horse seemed to sink closer to the ground, his stride lengthened, and he brought a gale from the windless night.

The road led out of the hollow and down a cañon. Rosey followed it, nor did he slacken the horse's run before they had passed the gates of Thunder Gap. Then he brought him down to a steady lope and held him in that until the lights of Banning blinked ahead.

Skirting the town, he picked up the road again and came at last to the short-cut that led toward the Double Cross. There he rested the horse.

In his excitement he had not noticed the pain of the dog's bite; now he saw that his arm was bleeding badly from a gash at the wrist, and he felt the weakness of fatigue.

When he started on again, he rocked in the saddle, fighting the faintness that came as the miles dragged on.

Toward morning, as he reached the Double Cross, he could but slide from his horse and stumble to the bare mattress of his bunk. Vaguely in his mind was the urge to keep up and watching; but his body seemed dead, and he slept.

CHAPTER XI

JAIL-BIRDS OF A FEATHER

STILL faint, heavy with sleep, Rosey awoke to the sound of voices within his room. He sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared at a stranger who wore a sheriff's badge upon his vest. Behind him stood Hank Monk.

"Robin Hood," said the sheriff, "you're under arrest."

He dangled a pair of handcuffs.

"Stick out your mitts."

Bewildered, Rosey stood up.

"Not so fast here! What's the charge?"

"Murder. Committed last night in the Park."

Rosey sneered.

"Sort of quick to jump on me, aren't you? Think I'm fool enough to stay around here if I'd done it?"

The sheriff was eyeing the bloodstained wrist.

"Maybe you'll tell us where you got that?" he demanded.

"And maybe I won't!"

"How come you're not at the line-house where I sent you?" Monk asked, leering at him. "Your horse is still hot and drippin' sweat. I suppose he got that way standin' by the door all night."

"If he didn't," Rosey retorted, "that's none of —— business either!"

"Cut out the argument," the sheriff ordered, waving Monk aside. "We've got witnesses to prove that this man was in the Park last night. Of course this isn't your gat?"

Rosey stared at the gun the sheriff held out. It was his, dropped in the fight with the dog. He shrugged. Then his fists clenched, but the two men grabbed him and the rings were clamped around his wrists.

He was led to a car standing outside the bunk-house and locked into the front seat by a bar that fastened down over his legs. He scoffed at this. The dirty skunks—it wasn't because he was a murderer that they made sure to hold him. Murder. ——! There hadn't been any. He looked at the sheriff and saw nothing but a weak sort of trickery in the small, shifty eyes and red-lined face. So even the law was in with the gang of thieves and bootleggers!

When the car reached the cottonwood lane Rosey looked back and saw Monk climbing the fence toward Kyber King. His face reddened with rage. He'd kill Hank Monk if he harmed that horse.

The ten miles to town passed without a word. Rosey sat trying to plan some way of escape from this frame-up and saw none. His hope was even less when he reached the Banning jail. It looked like a crumbling pile of adobe mud, but its sun-baked walls were hard and three feet thick, There was a door in front and a window on one side; the roof was made of timbers covered with mud and rock.

Released from the car, he was led through the doorway into a small room that seemed to be the sheriff's, shoved past the iron grating of another door that opened into a corridor and brought to a halt between two short rows of cells.

Then the bolt of a lock clicked, a door swung open and he was booted into a hole that smelled of damp earth. The only light came from a window placed high on one wall. The whole place was dim, odorous, silent, with a musty chill that was a sudden change from the heat outside.

The sheriff covered him while he removed the handcuffs.

"When do we eat?" Rosey asked. "I didn't get my breakfast."

"I reckon you can wait."

The sheriff retreated, slammed the cell door and went on to his office in front.

Rosey found an iron bunk and sat upon it, staring into the dank gloom about him. From his shirt pocket he drew his tobacco and papers, the only things the sheriff had left him, and rolled a cigaret. Lighting it, he filled the cell with clouds of smoke, trying to make that do for breakfast.

Abruptly he stopped.

"Hey!" came a voice from across the corridor. "Blow that over this way, will you?"

Rosey stood up, peering through the bars of his door.

Phil Davis, ex-aviator, returned the stare from the opposite cell.

"Perhaps you could throw me the butt," he suggested.

Rosey laughed, took his half-burned cigaret between his thumb and forefinger and flipped it through the bars.

Phil recovered it and heaved a grateful sigh.

"Man!" he exclaimed, "I'm glad you came. What are you in for anyway?"

"Murder."

"Huh?"

"That's the charge," said Rosey, grinning.

"Well, at least you know what you're in for. I don't."

Rosey's smile relaxed; his voice lowered to a whisper.

"Then how'd you get in?" he demanded.

"Knocked out and dragged in. Happened to be flying over this part of the country and ran out of gas. Came down after some and got shot at, arrested and my ship burned. How's that for a story?"

"I can tell a better one," Rosey replied gravely, "and add something to it. I sure wish we'd seen each other a few days ago. Cripes! You and your flying outfit could have taken me some place and saved all this mess."

"Taken you where?" Phil asked.

"Up a mountain back yonder."

"Never mind, brother; I tried it! That's where my troubles began."

"Did you see any cows," Rosey asked eagerly, "on a sort of a mesa up there?"

"I wasn't looking for anything but a place to land—then the shortest way out after I'd found it!"

"Chased off?"

"Yea, verily—shot off."

Rosey looked intently at the face across the corridor.

"Son, if you could take me over that place again, I'd give you the best ranch in this valley—if I had the ranch."

"Big boy," replied the other with equal solemnity, "if you could get me out of this hole, I'd fly you up there for nothing—if I had the ship."

Rosey sighed.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we've got several things to figure out."

"Yep; and I expect if you'd roll me another smoke I could do a lot more thinking."

Rosey made a cigaret and flipped it through the bars. Then he returned to the bunk and sat there with his head bowed upon his hands.

The morning passed. At noon they were each given a bucket of watered stew and a chunk of bread. Apparently that was also their supper, for the approach of evening brought nothing more.

From where Rosey sat he could look through the grating of the door which led into the sheriff's room and see that officer of the law lounging with his feet upon a table, smoking a fat cigar.

It was about dusk, the time when shadows turn gray and merge into the vague shapes that make them, when Rosey saw a stooped, wasted figure of an old man come tottering into the office and stop before the sheriff. He saw the sheriff's feet swing down from the table and heard his gruff—

"What do you want?"

The next instant the stooped figure had straightened and leaped with the swiftness of a bob-cat, and the two men were carried beyond Rosey's line of vision. He heard the thud of falling bodies, a short scuffle on the floor, then silence.

Presently the little old man came down the corridor, jingling a bunch of keys, and stood hesitant in the darkness.

"Mis' Lobin Hood?" he called softly.

Rosey leaped to the door of his cell.

"Quong Lung! Here— What the ——"

A key clanked in the lock, the door opened and he stood in the corridor staring at the unreadable face of the Chinaman.

Without a word Quong Lung started back toward the front room.

Rosey clutched him.

"My pal," he said, pointing to the other cell. "He goes too."

The Chinaman shook his head.

Rosey drew back.

"Then go on. I'll stay here. That man, I tell you, is my friend!"

Quong Lung studied him a moment, shrugged and unlocked the other door.

Together the three passed into the front room. The sheriff was on the floor, gagged, blindfolded, his arms and legs bound with a length of rope. Rosey marveled at the thoroughness of the job as he stooped over the prone man, lifted a gun from his holster and gave it to Phil. He found his own in the sheriff's back pocket, then followed Quong Lung to the outer door.

The street was almost deserted. The sounds and smells of supper came from a nearby café. Across and farther down, one light blazed from Kelley's Bar. Quong

Lung turned in the opposite direction from this, slipped back of the jail and led the way through a sage-grown path toward the hills beyond.

They walked steadily for many minutes. Rosey alternately smiled and frowned; smiled when he thought of his escape from jail; frowned when he wondered what it meant.

Phil shuffled along with his hands in his pockets, and Rosey heard the softly whistled tune of a march.

Quong Lung padded ahead, unstooped now, looking nowhere but in front, saying nothing.

At last they came to the mouth of a ravine and almost stumbled upon two horses tied beneath a tree. One was Fay Banning's sorrel, the other was Kyber King.

Swiftly Quong Lung untied the big black, held out the lines to Rosey, and with them a folded sheet of paper. In another moment he had swung upon the sorrel and was gone into the blackness of the night.

Rosey looked at the note in his hand.

"Just what in ——," he asked, "do you reckon this is?"

"Read it, man, read it!" Phil retorted. "If any more queer things happen I'll bust."

Rosey struck a match and, holding it close to the paper, read the message aloud:

"To Robin Hood. By the time you read this you will be a marked man—a jail-breaker—so you will have to do what I'm going to ask. Leave Banning Valley at once. This is for your own good—and mine. I am giving you this chance to escape because I know your intentions have been to help me. You'll do that more by doing as I say. Go!"

The note was printed with a pencil and unsigned, but Rosey knew Fay Banning had written it.

"Well?" Phil asked. "I suppose you'll be leaving."

"Like ——! This letter is from a woman, and I always do just opposite from what they say."

Rosey was silent for some time! then abruptly he turned to Phil.

"Remember what you said back there in jail?"

"About flying over the mountain?"

"Yes. Will you do it?"

"Sure. If you show me the ship. Mine's gone and I'm broke."

"So am I, but could you get one if we had the money?"

Phil considered a moment.

"Yes. I could buy one from a buddy in Cañon City for about eight hundred dollars."

"And how long to fly it back here?"

"Three hours from the time I leave the city."

"Then let's go!"

Rosey swung on to Kyber King.

Phil sprang up behind.

"Where to?" he asked, clutching the saddle-back as the horse leaped out of the ravine.

It was a moment before Rosey replied. He was recalling the conversation he had overheard between Hotfoot and Duarte. At last he answered—

"Back to town—for a thousand bucks!"

CHAPTER XII

HEAVENWARD BOUND

THERE was a fight in front of Jay Kelley's. A volley of shots that flashed in the dark; a stampede of horses at the tie-rack; customers from the bar crowding into the street to see what it was all about.

All went but one. For five minutes Phil Davis had been sitting in an obscure corner waiting for Rosey to play his hand outside. He had already identified Jay Kelley, a fat-jowled man with his hat on, who seemed preparing to make a trip.

When, at the sound of the shooting, Kelley slipped toward a back room, Phil stepped in behind him and thrust the muzzle of a gun into the fat back.

"Stretch up!" he ordered, kicking the door shut behind them.

Kelley obeyed. In one glance around the small room Phil saw a partly open safe with a handbag showing inside. He removed a gun from his prisoner's hip pocket and said:

"Hand me that bag. Move!"

As Kelly seemed to hesitate Phil poked the gun into his neck. That had its effect. Kelley stooped and drew the bag from the safe. Still covering his man, Phil opened it and hastily thumbed the bills that lay inside.

"Good. I guess there's a thousand all right."

Kelly looked at him sharply.

"How in —— did you know?"

Phil ignored the question. The shooting out in front had ceased; a babble of shouts had taken its place. Then came a scratching on the back door of the room.

"Unlock it," Phil ordered, "and walk straight ahead."

Kelley's hands shook as he turned the key, but the gun at his neck urged him on. The door opened, and he stepped into the darkness. Phil saw two brawny arms reach out, clutching Kelley's throat and throwing him to the ground. Then he followed.

"Quick!" said Rosey. "Beat it to the station. There's a train due now. They haven't found the sheriff yet, so no one will know you. I'll take care of this bird until you're safe. Meet me—you know where!"

NOT many hours after springing the trap at Jay Kelley's, Rosey sat in the doorway of an abandoned farmhouse in the rolling country some miles to the west of Banning and squinted up into the blaze of a midday sky.

He had long been expecting the roar of Phil's return, and had heard none. Then out of the dome above, right out of the sun it seemed, he saw a speck come dropping down, a dun-colored ship that shot toward earth in short spirals, diving at a speed that held him breathless.

In what seemed no more than a second he could make out the wing-struts, then the head of the driver, and still it dropped. Rosey stared. But there was no crash. A few hundred feet from the ground the ship leveled out in a long swoop and skimmed the valley floor, then, turning back toward the ranch house, it bounced across a clearing and stopped.

"Lord!" said Rosey, realizing that he planned to fly in that thing. "I'd rather walk."

He went to meet Phil, and together they inspected the new purchase.

"She's an old buzzard," said the airman, "and flys like a lame duck. Didn't have time to tune her up and one wing's tied on with fence-wire." He grinned at Rosey's consternation. "But cheer up, big boy; we might as well go out in a crash as be hung for murderers and jail-breakers!"

"I ain't never been flying," Rosey objected. "And I'd sort of like to begin on something solid."

"Aw, that's all right. She's sea-going. What's the program?"

Rosey sighed.

"Heavenward bound! All I want to do is fly over Big Smoky, drop down into that mesa and see how many cattle I can count. Is that a pretty big order?"

"Nothing to it. I don't believe we could land—some one took a shot at me, you know—but I can cut grass with this old tub if you'll do your counting on the run."

"I can make an estimate—if we do find the cattle I expect are up there some place."

"Then let's get going. We don't want to be caught on that rock-pile after dark."

They boiled some coffee and ate dinner from the canned stuff Phil had brought. Then he worked on the ship while Rosey went to the old barn and fed Kyber King.

An hour after noon they were ready. When Rosey examined the "flying bronc," as he had termed the plane, Phil explained some of its more vicious tricks.

"Don't get scared if she turns on her back once in a while," he said with a grin. "She may stand up on her tail, or fall on one ear, or perhaps take a dive for earth, but just hang on and stay with her, same as you'd do with any bronc!"

"Trying to kid me?" said Rosey.

"No. She rides rough, and I'm telling you about it so you won't worry. You may need your head for other things. If you have to do any shooting, do it up, or down, or out the side; if you shoot in front you might hit the propeller. And with that stick busted we'd go down sure."

"I'll remember," Rosey promised.

Phil blocked the wheels and drew a charge of gas into the motor with a few turns of the stick. He showed Rosey how to give it a final pull and climbed into the rear cockpit.

"All right," he said.

Rosey jerked down on the propeller, leaping away from the sudden whirl of the blade.

The motor roared as Phil warmed it up, then slowed to idling speed.

"Take away the blocks."

Rosey kicked the stones from in front of the wheels, crawled under one wing and climbed into the forward seat.

As he slipped a pair of goggles over his eyes and buckled the safety belt around his middle, he experienced a tenseness that he had not felt since riding his first bronc. Then the motor burst into a deafening roar, a rush of wind swept past him, and the ship moved ahead, bumping over the ground and gaining speed until at last it rode like a feather in a breeze.

Phil circled above the old ranch building for several minutes, gaining altitude before attempting the flight across the valley to the mountains. When the country below was but a sheet of brown he straightened the rudder bar and headed toward the dome of Big Smoky.

Rosey leaned back in his seat, crossed his legs and began to enjoy this new game. Sometimes it was rough, almost as jolting as a stiff-legged horse. Sometimes he felt the ship sink, and his stomach rose into his throat. Always he felt as if he might fall through the floor; but flying, he decided, wasn't half-bad.

Far ahead he recognized the buildings of the Double Cross, and a splotch of darker color spread out before them that he knew was the herd Hank Monk had gathered for the round-up. In no time at all they were below him, then Big Smoky rose from a sea of green.

Abruptly the motor's roaring ceased. Rosey was startled by Phil's voice, sounding strangely up there in that world of nothing.

"Is your belt on? We're going down. I'll circle into the mesa and stay there until you signal me out—if nothing happens."

Rosey's "All right!" was drowned by the continued roar of the motor. A moment later that stopped again, to be replaced by a sudden whistling rush of air as the world turned over and swung around and around before the ship's nose.

Clutching the sides, all Rosey could realize was that the green earth was spreading out, developing into cañons, trees and bare spots. He breathed more easily when the world again took its place beneath instead of ahead of him.

They were now less than a thousand feet above the mesa. He could see the slopes of Big Smoky rising from three sides of the broad, flat shelf on the mountain. The fourth side was broken, dropping away to the mine-buildings in the lower hollow and on down the cañon.

It was into this notch on the fourth side that Phil flew as they continued to drop closer toward the mesa floor. He had said he could cut grass; Rosey believed it now. They all but touched the tree-tops that lined the notch, then skimmed the flat land beyond, scattering a herd of cattle that were hidden there on the mountain.

Even at the speed of his flight, Rosey glimpsed the brand they bore, and he estimated the number in the herd as Phil circled twice around the mesa.

Scarcely had they completed their second circuit when there came a flash below, and a gray-winged shape shot from beneath the trees and rose to meet them. Rosey felt the sudden lift of the ship as Phil jerked its nose up; saw a wall of green as they banked close to the mountainside and turned back toward the notch.

The plane below was racing to head them off, climbing with a speed that was greater than theirs, crowding them into the tree-toothed gates of the mesa.

Almost wing to wing they roared through the break, the steep slope of the mountain dropped away, and the two planes shot over the cañons of the foot-hills a thousand feet below.

There began a battle; a fight such as Rosey had often watched between two buzzards—diving, turning, dropping down to climb again; collisions avoided by the space of yards.

At first he could only cling to his seat. He cursed Phil for staying in the fight. Fool! Why didn't he get away. Then he realized the truth. Phil was trying to escape, but they were now like a sparrow before a hawk, dodging the rushes of the other plane that threatened to force them crashing into the cañons below.

Once, on even keel, the two ships came abreast. It was as if they were stationary there in the sky with the roar of wind rushing past. Rosey drew his gun and leveled it over the cockpit. In that moment he recognized the red-bearded face of Hotfoot Hayes and saw the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun aimed toward him. He emptied his own weapon into thin air as Phil plunged their ship below the other men's scattering shot.

The foot-hills had slid into the flatland, and the two planes were rushing high above the floor of Banning Valley.

Again Hotfoot swept down upon them. The shotgun flashed. Rosey felt a jerk in the ship's vibration, a lurch downward, a moment of recovery; then the pressure of wind in his face grew unbearable, and everything else was obliterated in the screech of his falling ship.

The earth leaped up; not whirling as it had done before, but coming straight toward them. Terrified, Rosey strove to turn so that he might see Phil. The hurricane forced him down into the cockpit. His muscles grew tense. The whole ship was trembling, fluttering like a flag in the wind. Rosey stared at the floor. His head whirled. He was dazed, sickened.

He scarcely knew when it was that the pressure slackened, the shrieking ceased, and he felt the ship right itself in a long swooping curve. He looked over the side. Trees, fences, fields were sliding by in a blurred stream just below.

Looking up, he saw no sign of the other plane, and he sat limp in his seat until the old farm-house loomed ahead and Phil had landed in the clearing. Then he was the first to leap to the ground.

"And if you ever get me in that thing again," he flung back, "it'll be when I'm already dead!"

"Sure had a close one, didn't we?" Phil grinned at Rosey's pale face. "I wondered myself if we'd ever come out of that last dive, but it was the only way to shake off that murdering——."

"Well, I for one am through—with flying. But our job is just started. Are you sticking to the end?"

"Am I! This much has only warmed me up. What's next?"

"I'll tell you while we eat."

Dusk was already throwing shadows of the hills across the valley floor. Over an early supper of left-overs from the midday meal Rosey told his plans.

"I've learned considerable today," he said. "Now we've got to get the old man, Dave Banning, I mean, and round up the whole —— gang. I'll ride to Clearwater tonight. That's a little tank station down the railroad where no one will know me, and I'll send a telegram to Banning. He's in Cañon City, but he can get to Clearwater on the first morning train—if I make it urgent. You'll join us with your flying bronc after sun-up. That's all I can say until after I've seen the boss."

Phil considered this information in silence.

"Expect a scrap?"

"I expect several things. You've hardly had a taste of it today. It's a desperate gang—killing a man is only their beginning."

It was dark by the time Rosey left the farm-house and started down the valley to Clearwater, and past midnight when he reached the railway station that was all to be seen of a town.

Ten dollars, part of the two hundred Phil had not spent on the ship, helped to soothe the station agent's wrath at being aroused from a good sleep and secured speedy dispatch of the message Rosey scrawled on a telegram blank:

> D. Banning, care headquarters cattle association, Cañon City NM. Come at once. Meet me Clearwater first morning train."

He signed it "Fay," knowing that would bring the ranchman quicker than anything else.

Then, with the message on the wire, he rode back into the sage, found a place that suited as a bed and stretched upon it. For some time he lay gazing at the stars, lost in thoughts of the afternoon's experience. He wanted to make further plans, but that, he knew, was useless until after he had seen Dave Banning.

CHAPTER XIII

ENEMIES MEET.

ROSEY awoke at dawn, shook the sand from his clothes and rode back to the station. Phil came with the sunrise as usual, dropping to a reckless landing on a spot beyond the station. And the first train east brought Banning.

Not wanting to risk being identified by any of the passengers, Rosey waited behind a shed until the last coach rolled by. Then he went to meet the ranchman.

"Hello," said Banning. "Where's the girl?"

Rosey smiled.

"Home, I guess. I sent that telegram."

"What's the trouble?" Banning demanded, scowling. "I was busy down there —didn't intend to come back for another week."

"I know it. But too much —— has been happening around the place. I had to send for you."

As they walked to where Phil waited near his ship, Rosey told of his discoveries;

the cavern in Big Smoky; his ride to the Park; his arrest and meeting with the flyer; their trip over the mountain.

"I've proved everything," he ended. "Monk and Jay Kelley are trading your cattle for booze that Hotfoot flies in from the border. Even the sheriff is in with the gang."

"Sounds like a pipe-dream!" Banning replied. "Maybe the cattle you saw up on top weren't mine. Remember, I took count last fall. I can't believe that any one could have thinned out several hundred head of my stuff in eight months. Besides that, Monk's been with me for five years, and outside of his taste for bootleg I haven't found anything against him."

"Bootleg can raise the —— with a man sometimes," Rosey suggested.

Banning seemed unconvinced.

"No doubt you've seen things that will stand explaining, Sir Robin, but you are making a mighty serious charge against my foreman. How do you intend to prove it?"

"By another count! Man! I know what I know. And others know more than they're telling."

Rosey thought of Fay, but decided not to tell that it was she who had fixed his escape from jail.

The ranchman remained silent.

"It's my guess," Rosey went on, "that there won't be any need of a count. When you suggest it, Hank Monk is going to object like blazes; if you insist he'll pull out."

"What if he doesn't?"

"Then there'll be —— to pay. I'll stake everything on the results of that count." Rosey grew reckless in his confidence. "I'll go back to jail," he added, "and be guilty of all their framed-up charges if I'm not right."

For a moment Banning hesitated; then he said slowly:

"I'll do it. A count will take valuable time, but I must admit queer things have happened, and perhaps you have discovered the reason. I can believe anything about Hotfoot and Jay Kelley. At the same time I can't be too quick to jump on my foreman. Even Fay believes in him, and I go a lot on her hunches."

Rosey shrugged and said nothing. They had come to where Phil stood waiting. Rosey introduced the two men.

"If you don't value your life very much," he said to Banning, "this young —— will take you to the Double Cross in half an hour. You'd better have him land before you get to the place and keep him out of sight. Some of Monk's friends from town might recognize him, but I doubt it."

"What will you do?" Banning asked.

"I'll ride in. I'm a jail-bird, you know, so perhaps you had better meet me just beyond the cottonwoods after dark and let me know what has happened. Then I can go on in if everything's all right. If I were you I'd hold a gun on Hank Monk when I ask for a count!"

Banning laughed nervously.

"Monk is no fool," was all he said.

Rosey watched the two men prepare for their flight. Then he helped start the motor and waved to them as they took off. When they were up and away toward the Double Cross he mounted Kyber King and followed them up the valley.

A LIGHT gleamed in the windows of the ranch-house. Other lights, the camp-fires of the Mexican riders, flickered in the darkness around it. Toward them, through scattered bunches of cattle, Rosey made his way, reached the cottonwoods that separated him from the encampment, and stopped.

The voices of the Mexicans came as a subdued muttering. Only when they laughed or sang to the plunk of a guitar could he hear distinct words.

For many minutes he sat waiting on Kyber King, a blacker shadow in the blackness of night, until presently he saw the short, stocky figure of Dave Banning approach along the lane. He was about to slide from his horse and meet the ranchman, when the one figure resolved itself into another, and two men walked slowly past his hiding-place.

They were talking in low tones.

"I want to get at the bottom of this thing," Banning was saying, "and do it fairly for all concerned."

"Of course you do, and so do I." It was Hank Monk speaking; his voice was smooth, cajoling. "I know your new hand has been suspicious of me—the lord knows what for—but at the same time I've had my doubts about him. Then when he was caught red-handed in that trouble in the Park, and arrested, it sure looked bad. Now if we take this count and everything's all right, it'll just prove that he's trying to hang something on me. Won't it? Sure. Then I'm dang willing to take count. But let's all be on hand—Isn't that fair?"

"Well, yes," Banning agreed. "No reason why we shouldn't all be around."

"Of course not. I ain't got nothing against him personally. It's my opinion he's sort of cracked—all this business about Robin Hood. I reckon he was pulling off one of them stunts when he tried to rob Hotfoot up there in the Park."

The two men passed out of hearing down the lane. Rosey wished he could have seen Banning's face. He wondered how much of Monk's story the old man believed. Why was Monk with him anyway? Here was a turn for which he was unprepared. Monk was tricky; —— tricky. Rosey began to realize he had not given the man due credit for ability to cover up his tracks. He had supposed the count last Fall might have been straight, that the thinning out had been done since that time. Tonight he believed that Monk's rustling had been carried on even before then.

There was a trick in the counting—some way to fill in the gap. Fill in the gap—that was it! Rosey had a hunch; the stolen cattle could not be brought down from Big Smoky, but there was something else.

The more he pondered, thinking back over his discoveries, the more he became convinced that he saw at least part of Hank Monk's ruse.

Sliding from his horse he peered down the lane in the direction Banning and Monk had gone. There was nothing to be seen in the darkness beyond. Let them wait! Rosey stepped from his hiding-place, and leading Kyber King, walked the opposite way, toward the bunk-houses.

He was leaning against the door of his shack, smoking, when the two men returned half an hour later. They both started in surprize when they saw him.

"How the —— did you get here?" Banning demanded. "We've been waiting out in the cottonwoods."

"Thought I might as well come on in," Rosey drawled. "It ain't my custom to do business in the dark."

He surveyed Monk as he spoke.

"Well, now," Banning replied, "that's just what I thought. So I had Monk come along. You're both accusing the other—there has been too —— much mystery around this ranch already—let's have it out in the open. We're going to take count at the round-up tomorrow—and some one will sure have his neck in —— before night."

Banning turned to go, then added:

"I'm leaving you men together. If I hear any shooting out here I'll come loaded for trouble. And if either of you tries to pull out I'll have the whole —— State looking for you. I've had enough. Get that, both of you!"

When the ranchman had gone, Monk walked closer to Rosey and stood rolling a cigaret, a leer upon his face, arrogant, confident, insulting by his very silence.

With clenched fists Rosey controlled the murderous rage that swept over him, and steadily returned the other's gaze, until without a word Monk turned and crossed to his bunk-shack.

Rosey unsaddled Kyber King and tied him near the door. Then he stood on the steps, staring into the night.

A lamp in one window of the ranch-house sent its glow out upon the vine-covered veranda, dimly revealing two figures who sat on a bench and looked into the darkness, just as Rosey was doing.

He had scarcely thought of Phil Davis since returning to the Double Cross, but he did now. For one figure was that of the flyer, and the other was Fay Banning.

Rosey frowned as he saw them; then smiled. He couldn't see himself doing that, and he'd known Fay for some time. But Phil was diving headlong, as usual, and the girl was enjoying the flight. Well, let them—tomorrow was another day.

CHAPTER XIV

MAN TO MAN.

THAT day began with the dawn, and before mid-morning the Double Cross was plunged beneath a cloud of dust that rose over the backs of an endless shuffling herd, then curled in great mushrooms into the breathless air and settled in a yellow, choking fog upon buildings, trees and men.

Old cows bellowed, calves bawled, and above the din was the constant: "Shook! Shook! Shook! Sheeah, sheeah!" of the Mexican riders; their dark faces plastered with mud, streaked with sweat; red bandannas, blue bandannas, pieces of shirts tied around their necks and over their noses.

The horses they rode did the work with scarcely a guiding command, cutting out, following up, to cut again; darting and whirling behind bolting cows with an intelligence that was better than human.

Banning had said that to count his herd was a big job, but it was made easier by the location of the ranch-buildings. Grouped in the clump of cottonwoods, they stood almost in the center of the broad mouth of the cañon that extended into the hills behind them.

The incoming herds were gathered to the west of the cottonwood group and flowed into the cañon on that side, filling the enclosure between the ridges with a restless sea of brown and white. In there the calves were cut out and branded; then the whole string was shoved back into the valley through that half of the cañon mouth east of the trees.

It was here that the counting was being done, as the animals hooked their way through a gate in the board fence.

On one side, Dave Banning sat astride the top-rail, mechanical counter in hand, checking his cattle as they plunged by. Opposite him, on Kyber King, Rosey also counted, staring at the growing figures on the contrivance he punched. Two thousand four hundred and sixty—and still they came!

Midday had passed. He was faint with the fatigue of sleepless nights; his eyes burned in the sun; he was dizzy from the rushing stream of cattle. But there was no quitting now!

Twenty-eight hundred—the flow was endless.

He looked into the cañon, over a sea of heaving backs; a thousand there. And that was not all! Turning toward the valley, he squinted at the widening fan-shaped mass of animals slowly spreading over the floor after being counted, then resumed his checking.

Three thousand passed. That number, Rosey had told Banning, would see the end. He had been wrong. The cañon was still full of uncounted animals; stragglers were still being driven in through the western gate. Rosey looked for Hank Monk and saw him riding through the close-packed cattle up where the cañon began to narrow.

Fay Banning had been out earlier in the morning, but she was nowhere in sight now. Rosey wondered where Phil was staying; he had not seen the airman since last night. His thoughts wandered, but he punched, punched, punched. Steadily, mechanically the figures grew.

When they registered three thousand two hundred, Rosey stopped. There was no use counting more; the cattle were there, hundreds more, still jammed in the cañon—but how! His eyes again swept over the mass that moved away across the valley. The fan-shape had divided into several strings. Mexican riders were shoving them eastward, away from the line that was being brought in.

Suddenly Rosey's glance followed along the line that curved close to the hills. Those Mexicans were doing their job too well! Occasionally he saw a rider urge a bunch on even after there was no danger that the animals would mix with the incoming herds.

He looked across the cattle stream at Banning. The ranchman's eyes were upon his counter. Slowly, he drew in his lines. Kyber King lifted his head, his muscles tensed, quivered. A moment he paused, then with a maddened squeal, goaded by the sting of a lash upon his rump, he lunged through the cattle and shot toward the eastern ridge of hills.

Looking back, Rosey saw Hank Monk pounding his horse down the cañon, leading two Mexicans in pursuit. He heard three reports of the foreman's gun. There came an answering shot, and ahead he saw the Mexicans down in the valley leave the cattle string and race to cut him off.

Where the spur of the ridge dropped down to meet the valley floor he turned Kyber King into the brush and sent him at a run up the backbone. When it joined with a higher one, he turned eastward again, heading for the cañon up which he had chased Duarte on that day he had discovered the cavern in Big Smoky.

Behind him he saw that the gang of Mexicans led by Monk had changed their course with the change in his. Theirs was the easier trail; while they loped up the dry stream-bed he was crashing through the brush that covered the ridge.

When he reached the brink of the cañon he was met by a spatter of lead from below, and half a dozen riders swept up the bank toward him. He turned and fled along the ridge, but in that fleeting glimpse of the bottom he had seen enough.

The stream-bed was pitted with the hoofmarks of cattle. Where the cañon turned, a dark hole yawned in its side; the willows that had screened it were now trampled down by the herd of animals that had been driven into the mountain. Here was the entrance; the exit must be somewhere at the head of the cañon behind the Double Cross. Rosey sped on, smiling with contempt as he looked back and saw the distance widen between Kyber King and the mounts of the Mexicans.

Then that smile died. Hank Monk was no longer with them.

Rosey scanned the ridge and searched the bank that dropped down on his right but he saw no way that the foreman could ambush him from ahead.

In half a mile the backbone ended abruptly, sliding into a ravine which cut it at right angles. Into this ravine Rosey jumped his horse, followed down and came out of it into the gulch below the north fence. He was not surprized at what he saw there. Steep walls rose on either side and between them a string of cattle straggled toward the Double Cross.

Charging the line, he raced down the gulch, looking for a way out and the shortest trail back to the ranch-house. His proof was complete; here was part of the herd already counted, being driven through tunnels beneath the foot-hills to a point behind the broad cañon, then down that to be mixed with the cattle jammed in its mouth—and counted again.

In the curving course of the gulch he could no longer see the Mexicans behind him, but he could hear their shouts and the ring of hoofs on rock. He laughed at the race. Monk's last hope—to keep him from carrying his proof to Dave Banning—was already lost.

Suddenly the shouts of the Mexicans increased, like the baying of dogs on a trail. Rosey grew tense as his likeness came to his mind. Those calls had a meaning! He drew his gun from its holster, forgot the men at his back as he searched every turn of the cañon ahead.

Rounding a bend, he came into familiar ground; the fallen tree across the blind trail, and above it the mouth of his bear cave. He touched his horse's dripping neck, urging him on, for just beyond the next turn, he knew, was the break that would let him up and out of the cañon walls and away to the Double Cross.

The dead tree flashed by. Rosey shifted in his saddle, every sense trained down the cañon. But it was the sudden forward flip of Kyber King's ears that warned him, even before his own heard the rattle of rocks ahead. He drew the horse back on its haunches, whirling to retreat. And even as he turned, the vision of four horsemen flashed around the bend—the part of the Mexican gang that had not followed behind him from the Double Cross.

Duarte was in the lead. The next moment he had leaped to the ground, kneeling, with a rifle at his shoulder. A red groove spurted on the big black's rump, and Rosey felt his own leg go numb then run hot with the flow of blood. The cañon echoed with the yells of Mexicans closing in from above and below.

Blindly Rosey raced back to the fallen tree that blocked the trail up Big Smoky, thinking now only of his own escape—the Double Cross could wait. He clutched his numb leg as the horse leaped up. There was a crash of dead wood and a lunge of the body beneath him as Kyber King, his foot caught in the limbs of the trunk, somersaulted into the thicket beyond.

Flung from the saddle, Rosey struck the ground part way up the slope, mechanically clawing with hands and feet, dragging himself toward the protection of Ginger's cave. A low growl from the bear greeted him. He caught a glimpse of the animal backing away, the splints chewed from its left foreleg, the injury apparently healed. Then it disappeared in the blackness of the tunnel, and Rosey turned to peer over the rocks at the men below.

A bullet spat at his head. He changed his position and lay flat on the floor. Down in the cañon bottom the Mexicans had left their horses and were approaching up the slope, leaping behind trees and coming on under protection of brush and boulders. Rosey drew his gun. The black ——! Hotfoot's murdering cowhands, hired to Hank Monk for this occasion.

He aimed through a crevice in the rock at a careless head. A Mexican screamed. For some time after that no one moved. Then they came on again, slowly, more carefully now, peppering the cave mouth with their lead. Rosey counted nine of them—Duarte was missing.

Nine to one, and that one armed only with a revolver. Rosey soon realized that his six-gun was no match for the rifles most of the gang carried. While he held off one man eight others crept up toward the cave. He had heard of guerilla warfare; grimly he saw that it could have but one end. But he fought doggedly, saving his shells until some of the advancing figures became reckless before he sent one of them reeling back to cover.

There came a lull in the fighting, and in that moment of rest Rosey heard the tap of footsteps from within the depths of the tunnel. He flattened against the wall, clutching his gun, and waited.

The footsteps ceased; cut short with a startled curse in Mexican. Came a growl, then the roar of a shot echoing back in the mine, and a cry of terror that was scarcely human drowned the scream of the maddened bear.

A figure charged out of the darkness, Duarte, his right hand shredded, a knife held in his upraised left. The blow he aimed behind seemed caught in midair by a body that lunged upon him and hurled him to the floor in a lifeless mass with one gouging sweep of its razor claws.

So swiftly had it happened that Duarte lay dead and the bear had vanished back into the mine before Rosey could interfere.

A shot on the slope outside sent him again to the tunnel mouth. A handful of gravel spilled down upon him, a rifle cracked from above, and he leaped back. The Mexicans had covered the slope.

But the sounds of fighting continued. There was a scramble among the gang below, and Rosey saw that they were retreating before a steady rifle fire that came from over the mine.

He crept to the rocks again, peered out and added his shots to those of the unknown friend above. Caught between two lines of fire, the Mexicans fell back in a frenzied rush, mounted and fled into the cañon.

Rosey stared. Another trickle of dirt came from overhead, two trousered legs followed, and Fay Banning leaped down to the floor."

"Quick!" she panted. "They're coming. Take my rifle."

"Who?"

"Hank and Hotfoot. There!"

She almost dragged him out of the cave, pointing into the strip of sky between the cañonsides.

Rosey looked—then grabbed the rifle Fay held out. Down from Big Smoky, just as he had seen it on his first day in these hills a gray-winged bird swept with roaring motor, skimming the cañon, gaining speed for the leap over the ridges that flanked both sides.

It was not a hundred yards above the cañon floor; even the cross-wires of the wings were visible from the slope upon which Rosey knelt. Phil's advice came to him, "If you hit that stick, it'll go down sure!" and drawing a bead in front of the glittering whirl of the propeller, he emptied the rifle as the ship passed over his head.

A black fog shot from the motor's exhaust, the plane lurched, lost speed, skimmed the lower ridge on the valley side of the cañon and disappeared.

Fay's hands covered her eyes, her face turned white. Rosey stood squinting at the spot on the ridge over which the ship had gone.

"Lordy!" he exclaimed. "That thing must have gone down plumb in the back yard at the Double Cross."

Fay clutched his arm.

"Could it? Is the big cañon over that way? Then hurry. Dad and Phil are down there, but they may need help! My horse is up the trail. I saw yours in the trees."

Fay ran to her horse. Rosey tried to follow—and fell back, weak; his wounded leg all but a useless weight. The excitement of battle passed, exhaustion rushed upon him. But he fought it off and stumbled into the trees where the girl had seen Kyber King.

With movements that were automatic, muscles that worked from sheer habit, he dragged himself into the saddle and followed Fay. The girl puzzled him; a dozen questions whirled in his mind.

"How'd you find me?" he asked.

"I was already in the hills." Fay flung the words back jerkily, talking as she led on. "Been hiding up on the knob all day, watching through these glasses—saw everything. Phil was with me. Told me about the tunnel you'd discovered. This afternoon I saw the string of cattle driven down the big cañon and rode to see where they came from. Phil went back to tell dad.

Before I got here the fight had started—so I took a hand."

Pride forced Rosey to hide his pain when Fay looked back, and unknowing, she rode at a pace that was torture.

On the crest of the ridge that overlooked the Double Cross she stopped and waited for him to come abreast.

"Look!" she cried, her voice shaking with excitement. "They've got them—Phil and dad and Quong Lung—leading Monk and Hotfoot. No! Dad and Lung are taking them in. Phil's coming to meet us. Hurry!"

But Rosey no longer heard her words.

"They've got them" had sounded in his ears; then blindly he clutched at the black mane of his horse, and missed it; for everything was black.

He was falling through blackness; black prisons, black nights, black holes in blacker mountains, on and on, until he knew no more.

CHAPTER XV

THE WAY OF KNIGHTHOOD

THREE days passed; three lazy stupid days wherein Rosey slept and ate and slept again. When he awoke on the fourth morning a warm breeze was blowing in through the fluffy lace curtains of the guest room he occupied; a restless breeze of early Spring that stirred response in a restless soul.

Rosey yawned, stretched, then heaved himself out of the four-poster bed and crossed to the open window. His leg was stiff but workable, with the wound dressed by Dave Banning's old standby methods of caring for gunshot men.

For some time he stood looking out into the early morning. The sky was gold in the east. Westward across the valley the range of hills caught the first rays of the sun, their high peaks standing out like fence-posts, the dark cañons like open gates between; and Rosey fell to wondering what sort of a country lay beyond that distant ridge.

Then he turned from the window, dressed and let himself out onto the veranda of the ranch-house. He saw Phil coming up from the cottonwoods and went down the steps to meet him.

"Hey, there," was the airman's greeting. "Don't you know you're an invalid?"

"Nope. My hospital days are past. Up sort of early, aren't you?"

"Man, who wouldn't be!" Phil exclaimed. "Just look at the world this morning. Everything alive, happy; by golly, I never knew how good it was just to be living!"

A quizzical smile crossed Rosey's face.

"Just what in ——," he demanded, "is the matter with you?"

"Nothing—not a thing——"

"Which isn't the truth. Son, you've gone and got yourself in love. Now haven't you?"

"Well, Fay Banning sure is an unusual girl. Told me all about the mess around here."

"Did she say anything about Hank Monk?"

"Sure. Seems she sort of played up to Hank when he first came—he was a good fellow then. Afterwards he got mixed with this bootlegging outfit and went flooey. But Fay stuck by him; did everything she could to pull him out of the gang—and got in pretty deep herself. All this time Monk had kept his rustling covered up. Fay didn't know about that, so when you came along and began to raise the —— she thought it was only the bootleggers you'd discovered. I guess Monk threatened to kill off the whole family if you weren't run off."

"Aw, sure," said Rosey. "I understand."

Fay had already told him much of this herself.

He walked on down to the corral where Kyber King stood with neck craned over the fence, watching him. Phil went along.

"I'm going to give up flying," he announced. "No more fool stunts. Maybe I'll even turn cowpuncher."

Rosey listened and chuckled to himself as he tossed the saddle on Kyber King. He liked Fay, sure he did, but, lord—He looked at the young flyer and felt extremely wise.

Leaving Phil to wander in the barnyard, filled with the poetry of love and other things, Rosey led Kyber King back toward the ranch-house. On the veranda steps he met Banning, who seemed a little surprized at seeing him with the horse.

"Going somewhwere?" he asked.

Rosey grinned.

"No. Just anywhere!"

"I'll be needing a new foreman here on the Double Cross," Banning suggested.

Rosey had thought of this, had pondered

over it, slept on it, and now his decision was made.

"I'd sure appreciate the job," he replied, "but, well, I've sort of given up cow-farming for a time. And when I do go back to it, I've got a partner over in Texas that may need my help."

Banning laughed.

"I know. There's still a trail ahead that you've got to see. Isn't that it, Sir Robin?"

"I reckon you're right. But of course I'll stick around a while if things aren't straightened up yet."

"No need of that. I've hired new hands to bring back the bunch of my stuff that was collected up there on Big Smoky. While you were under the blankets the past few days I wired for State men to come and get Monk and Hotfoot. Jay Kelley and the sheriff pulled out but were picked up in Cañon City, so I guess we'll have no more trouble from that gang."

The two men walked up the steps in silence. Fay came from the house to meet them. Phil ambled in from the cottonwoods and joined the group.

In the patio Quong Lung had spread breakfast for four and it developed into a farewell banquet that lasted far into the morning. Then there was handshaking all around.

When it came Banning's turn he held out an envelope, saying—

"Open this later."

Something nipped at Rosey's shoulder, and, turning, he looked into the inquiring eyes of Kyber King.

"You're right, old boy," he said, laughing. "Let's go."

Silently the group on the patio steps watched the horse and rider pass down the cottonwood lane and climb the hill road, watched until the two merged into one, a black figure against the sunbright sky, that drifted across the rim of the ridge, paused, then dropped away.

THE IROQUOIS INDIANS OF NEW YORK

by A. S.

SURROUNDED by progressive farming communities, and subjected to missionary influences since early colonial times, there still remain in central and western New York a large body of Iroquois Indians, between five and six thousand in number, many of whom retain their ancient religion, rites and customs to this day.

A few miles from Syracuse are several hundred Indians, remnants of the once powerful Onondaga Nation. Near Buffalo, on the Cattaraugus, Allehgany, and Tonawanda Reserves are the Seneca. The Tuscarora are domiciled near Lewiston, and at St. Regis, on the Saint Lawrence River, is a mixed colony of Mohawk and Oneida blood. There are also some Oneida near Oneida Castle, in Madison County, although the majority of this tribe is now in Wisconsin, with scattering settlements in Canada, where most of the Cayuga, and some members of practically all the other tribes of the confederacy, may be found, at and near the Grand River Reserve in Ontario.

Of the New York Indians, the Tuscaroras have perhaps departed furthest from the ways of their ancestors, but the Onondaga and Seneca remain from one-half to one-third conservative. The annual rites of the Falsefaces, the Green Corn and New Year festivities are still held, and the secret medicine of the Little Waters Society is still held to be superior to the white doctors' pills.

Yet, while many Seneca and Onondaga still adhere to the ancient road not a few have donned the blue jean overalls of civilization, and many may be found all over the state employed at all manner of work.

At the present writing Mr. Arthur C. Parker, New York State Archeologist, and a Seneca Indian, is undoubtedly the greatest living Iroquois, if not the greatest living American Indian. He is distinguished for his knowledge of Indian affairs, from those of today to their archeology. President Coolidge recently called him to Washington to serve on the Committee of One Hundred, and the Masons of the State of New York have within a few months elevated him to the Thirty-third degree. It is probable that Mr. Parker is the first American Indian to ever receive this last distinction.

THE CAMP FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS comrade gives us word of one who witnessed one of the dramatic incidents of Wild Bill's life:

Fentress, Virginia.

After reading Fred Bechdolt's account of the Wild Bill-McCanles fight as gunman in his article headed "Boot Hill" and published in May 30, 1922 issue, and also E. A. Brininstool's version of the affair as given in his letter to Camp-Fire and published in *Adventure* for January 20, 1923, would like to say that Kate Schell, the woman in the case, as given in Mr. Brininstool's version of the affair is living today. She is now past 80 years of age and no doubt is the only living eye witness to the killing of McCanles by Wild Bill and she was in the house and saw the killing. She spent nearly 40 years in the West and has known most of the old-time Westerners, stage-drivers, pony express riders, gunfighters and others whose names have come down to us in history as pioneers of the Old West.—W. W. Danner.

SOMETHING from H. C. Wire about his story in this issue:

Laguna Beach, Calif.

This "*Robin Hood from Texas*" idea is one that I have had in mind for several months, but it was not until I rode in our round-up here last Spring, and again became familiar with old scenes and old faces, that I felt equal to writing the story.

ITS location, in a borderland where the ranchers of the foot-hills range their cattle up into the very ore dumps of the mines on the higher mountains, is not as unusual as it may sound.

I have seen this combination in different parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and California; in fact it comes about naturally in these States because the mining districts are usually located in arid or semi-arid mountain ranges that are flanked by valleys which are unsuitable for anything but cattle.

In the old days the miners had almost as much contempt for "those —— beef-chasers" as the cowhands had for sheep-herders, and many a good battle ensued when the rangemen strayed into a mining-camp, got lickered up and began to make themselves too numerous.

THE mine I have described, with its honeycomb of tunnels, its caverns, cave-ins, and The Park, is taken almost in exact detail from the famous Durant Mine in Aspen, Colorado. It was there that I started a short career in the mining game at the bottom—of a shaft one mile down. A cave-in which resulted in a cavern such as I have used in the story was one of those things that can never be forgotten.

I am writing of the present-day ranch, in this; one with all the modern tools, including an aeroplane. For that part of it I drew from my own Army flying days, and I can vouch for whatever stunts are included.—H. C. WIRE.

A FRAGMENT out of a letter from C. Maurice Elfer:

St. Rose, Louisiana.

Somewhere some poor devil of an adventurer is "bucking strong odds" in the eternal quest—somewhere, either on land or sea, far from relatives and friends. I wish it were possible for restless fellows—those who have spirit enough to join us in the wish—to meet somewhere at a big Camp-Fire meeting and exchange notes, dream, philosophize!

I AM grateful to think that my old friend, C. T. Prescott, of New Orleans and many other cities, adventurer and archeologist of note, has just escaped detention in Mexico during the fratricidal strife there. Prevented from going to Vera Cruz by the conflict between federal and rebel forces, as he attempted to return to New Orleans by water, then caught in the fighting at Jalapa, Prescott jumped on a horse and, suffering privation and being pretty hungry, he rode a long way to Correto, arriving there 20 minutes to 2 A.M., when he heard the whistle of the last train it was possible for him to board for the United States.

Prescott comes and spends the holiday season with me every year, each time coming from a different direction, and he is a real adventurer, being a traveler, reader, dreamer, smoker—and also a disciple of Nimrod and a disciple of Walton.

Prescott and I hope to travel toward the uttermost region this side of the North Pole during the Summer of 1924.—C. MAURICE ELFER.

FROM a personal letter from Leonard H. Nason of our writers' brigade I'm taking the liberty of extracting two paragraphs:

I had two very interesting letters this week, one from a man whose name is David Eadie, who wanted to know where I got the name that I used in my last story, as he said the Eadie family was very small and came from one place in Scotland. He enclosed a two cent stamp for me to reply, which I thought very nice of him. Well, the reason I took the name of Eadie was because I thought there would not be any one by that name who would bawl me out for maligning his family.

THE other letter was from a captain in the 11th Cavalry, who had some doubts as to the correctness of "Five Hundred Francs." He sent a copy of the story to his father, who was a bandmaster in the 77th Field Artillery, Fourth Division. As it happened, "Five Hundred Francs" was a Fourth Division story and the captain's father easily recognized the location, and from the tone of his letter he must have gone through that very same scrap, as he said he knew every one of the incidents. This did not quite satisfy the captain, who took the story up with some of the officers of a Field Artillery regiment, which was stationed in the same post he was. Glory be, the Artillery regiment was my old outfit, the 76th F. A., so the captain wrote me a very nice letter and enclosed the letter his father had written him about my story.—"STEAMER."

ANOTHER move by the anti-weapon people—one of the saddest yet, and for all its stupidity, indirectness and injustice, a dangerous one. The following letter from P. C. Cody of *Field and Stream* is an appeal to you which I'm glad to pass along. Mr. Cody, in the same letter, has expressed the appreciation of *Field and Stream* for the cooperation many of you have already given its campaign against the anti-weapon movement.

Field & Stream, New York City.

I am writing this to ask if you will not inform your readers through The Camp-Fire of the latest development in this anti-pistol movement—the bill which will be introduced into the present Congress to place an excise tax upon all pistols and revolvers and ammunition therefor sold in the United States. This bill is, we understand, the work of Chief Magistrate McAdoo of New York City, and was read before the convention of police chiefs held in this city last spring.

THE bill would impose a tax of $100 upon every pistol and revolver sold and a tax of $1 upon every loaded cartridge sold. If it becomes law it will cost every man who now owns a pistol or revolver $50, in addition to the cost of the ammunition, to buy a box of cartridges; and to purchase a pistol and ammunition for it will cost a minimum of $150 in addition to the retail price paid for the pistol and ammunition. You can readily understand that this will mean the immediate discontinuance of the manufacture of these weapons in the United States just as certainly as would a directly prohibitory law. And it furthermore amounts to confiscation without recompense, as the dealers, wholesalers and manufacturers would be unable to dispose of the large stock of weapons and ammunition they already have on hand. Even the small dealer stands to lose $1,000 and the big dealer with a large stock may lose many thousands.

This bill indicates very clearly the determination of the anti-pistol element to achieve their purpose. Doubtless, fearing their inability to achieve a directly prohibitory law, they are taking this roundabout but none the less effective means.

I CALLED up Chief Magistrate McAdoo's office a few weeks ago to inquire about the future of this bill. I was unable to speak with Mr. McAdoo but did speak with his secretary, who said that they had every intention of introducing the bill into this Congress and were simply waiting for the most favorable opportunity to do so, jockeying for position in the meanwhile. The bill, as we understand it, has the endorsement of the chiefs of police of the great majority of cities and towns in the United States, and doubtless of the prosecuting attorneys and the judiciary of most cities and towns. This naturally means a line-up which is not only organized and concentrated but also of tremendous political force—a line-up to which I fancy the average Congressman will give heed. In other words, unless a perfect storm of protest is made at the proper time it is quite possible that this bill will become law within the next year. How can we bring about such a protest? *Field and Stream* has done all it can, and beyond any question has done much, but it has not been able to do enough. We want your help.

AS AN interesting light on the mentality of those who are back of this anti-pistol movement I may say that when I asked Mr. McAdoo's secretary if he did not know that a large number of the cartridges which would be taxed if his bill became law are used in hundreds of thousands of rifles and are in fact as much rifle cartridges as they are pistol cartridges, he was very much surprized. I pointed out to him that the .22 cal., the .22-20 cal., the .44 cal. and the .45 cal., to mention only four of them, are used in rifles which are used by hundreds of thousands of men throughout the country and that these men, by this law, would be deprived of a right which even he did not object to. He said they hadn't thought of that.

It is funny the way these reformers are willing to kill the dog in order to get rid of a few fleas.—"*Field & Stream*," by P. C. CODY.

SOMETHING from Alanson Skinner about his story in this issue and also about himself:

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In telling the story I have adopted what, so far as I know is a new method. I am able to speak Menomini fairly well, and have some little acquaintance with Sauk, Potawatomi and Ojibway, so I have put the sentences into Indian form, so far as practicable, though using English words. My Menomini uncle, who is the narrator of this tale, does this habitually. Many, nay most, of the incidents of the tale, are true, and have been told me by various Menomini and Sauk Indians.

THE name Sauk means literally "Yellow Earth"—*osau*, yellow, *auki*, earth—while that of their invariable associates and allies, the so-called Foxes, is Meskawki or Red Earth. The name Akwimimi is a Menomini warrior's title, meaning "In-Everybody's-Mouth," and alludes to the fame of a renowned warrior. It was given only once in a life-time as a reward for valor.

Black Dog, the Sauk chief, was a chief of the Wolf clan of that people, and I have been so fortunate as to obtain his sacred war-bundle, or portable war shrine, filled with medicines, scalps, etc., which now reposes in the cases of this museum. All the war-customs described are authentic, in fact all the data on Indian customs, mannerisms of speech, etc., are absolutely correct.

The account of the Sauk raid on the Menomini village is made up of the stories of several of these raids. The Menomini still speak of the courage of two old men who were burnt alive, and of the woman who beat off the enemy and escaped. In fact this woman died not many years ago.

THE reference to the glaring eyes of Pakah, which presage death is to a common Menomini, Potawatomi, and Ojibway belief in a flying skeleton, which has terrible luminous eyes. If you feel or see the gaze of these eyes upon you, you are doomed, or some member of your immediate family will die.

"This Island" is the habitual expression of the forest Indians when referring to the world. Nahpatao is the deity who presides over the realm of the dead. The names given the war-club in this story, Pogamagezhik and K'jimisihigun, are of interest. My Menomini and Potawatomi friends, to say nothing of the Ojibways, tell me that there is a very famous war-club in the possession of the latter tribe somewhere in the forests of Minnesota. I don't want to say exactly where it is, for I hope some day to acquire it. The name means "Heavenly War-Club," and it is kept by a chief of renown, wrapped in many coverings of deerskin. If one can persuade the owner to show it, it is unwrapped with great care and ceremony, and many burnt offerings of tobacco. The beholder and all those present are warned solemnly not to raise it with the heavy end upward, as though to strike, for if that is done some one must be slain with it before it can be put away. Something like the belief I am told that Ghurkas hold concerning their knives. The K'jimisihigun is another famous war-club that I have seen—from a distance—its name means "Brain-Splasher," and it has a bloody history. It belongs to a Sauk. I applied these names to the war-club used by the hero of this tale because such is in full accordance with woodland Indian custom.—ALANSON SKINNER.

P.S.—I have just had five Menomini in my office, who have gone on over to my house to visit my wife and baby daughter who both have Indian blood. I have recounted this story to them, and they recalled many of the incidents as tales they had heard as children. Here is the biographical material.—A. S.

Born at Buffalo, N. Y., Sept. 7, 1886. Parentage—American (Scotch-English) of Revolutionary stock. Experience—1. American Museum of Natural History, N. Y., 12 years, Assistant Curator of Anthropology. 2. Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 5 years. 3. Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee. 1920 Assistant Curator of Anthropology; 1922 Curator. Field Experience—1902—Assistant, archeological fieldwork Shinnecock Hills, N. Y. (Algonkian region). 1904—Assistant, archeological fieldwork, Western New York, (Iroquois) Peabody Museum, Harvard. 1908—Head, exploration trip to Hudson Bay (Cree) American Museum. 1909—(A) Head, exploration trip to Hudson Bay (ethnology of Cree and Saulteaux) American Museum. (B) Head, ethnological work among Winnebago, Stockbridge and Menomini, Wis.

American Museum. 1910—(A) Head, ethnological work with Menomini Indians, Wis. (B) Head, exploration and ethnological work Seminole Indians in Florida Everglades, American Museum. 1911—Head, ethnological work with Menomini Indians, Wis. American Museum. 1912—(A) Head, ethnological work with Menomini and Potawattomi Indians, Wis. American Museum. (B) Head, archeological survey of the State of New Jersey, for New Jersey State Geological Survey. 1913—Head, ethnological work among Plains, Cree and Bungi Indians, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, American Museum. 1914—(A) Head, ethnological work among Iowa, Ponca, and Kansas Indians of Oklahoma. (B) Head, ethnological work among Sisseton, Sioux of South Dakota. American Museum. 1916—(A) Collaborator, mound exploration work, Arkansas. Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. (B) Co-head with Moorehead, Susquehanna R. Expedition. (C) Head, archeological work Western N. Y. and Canada. 1916-17—(A) Head, expedition to Panama and Costa Rica, both tomb exploration (archeology) and ethnological work among Bri-bri Indians of Talamanca Mountains. Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. (B) Collaborator, explorations of ruins of Hawikuh, Zuni, New Mexico. (C) Head, archeological work about New York City, Throg's Neck, Clason Point, Manhattan Island. 1919—(A) Head, expedition to St. Lawrence Valley, N. Y. archeology. (B) Head, expedition to Cayuga Co., N. Y. (archeology). (C) Collaborator with S. A. Barrett, Milwaukee Public Museum, mound exploration, Shawano Co., Wis. 1920—Collaborator, exploration shell-heap, Raritan Bay, N. Y. 1921—Assistant Curator of Anthropology, Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee. Mound work (exped.) Shawano Co., Wis. 1922—Curator of Anthropology, Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee. Head, expedition to Sauk, Kickapoo, Ioway and Otoe of Oklahoma. 1923—Head, expedition to Sauk, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Okla and Kansas.

I HAPPEN to own the particular Menomini war-bundle which drew forth this information for this story, having inherited it through my adopted relatives. It hangs in my house at present, and is an object of reverence to all Indians who visit me.

SAUK and Saukie are both derived from *osau*, yellow, and *auki* earth. Both terms are commonly used, and as indicated, are synonymous. In my experience the Indians, including the Sauk themselves, more commonly say "Saukie." The Government calls them Sac, which is far from the native pronunciation. In fact, the Government lists all Sauk and Fox Indians as "Sac and Fox," whereas the Sauk are now all in Oklahoma except a few at Nemaha, Kansas. The Fox, who call themselves "Meskwaki" or "Red Earths," are all at Tama, Iowa, and except for the Kickapoo, are the most primitive of all Forest Indians. Both Sauk and Fox regard themselves as distinct and separate peoples, once allied, and related in customs and language, but now, for upward of a hundred years, estranged and isolated. No one knows to this day why the Meskwaki are called Foxes. But it is conjectured that the first white man to meet a member of this tribe—a Frenchman, no doubt—asked him who he was, and the Indian, being a member of the Fox Clan, told him "I am a Fox" mistaking the query, hence the "Red Earths" have been "Renards" and "Foxes" ever since.

BLACK DOG, in the story, agreeable to an ancient custom, leaves his own war-club with the body, knowing that its peculiar insignia will identify him as the slayer. This was often done by various Indians. A Cree once told me, up on the Qu'appelle River in Saskatchewan, of a Blackfoot raid when a woman of his people was slain and the tomahawk with which the deed was done was left sticking in her head so that the finders would know by whom the deed was done. The Cree promptly raided the Blackfoot country, slew a man, and again left the tomahawk. The Blackfoot brought it back again, and so on for a long and bloody series of raids.

PRISONERS destined for torture were usually required to count their coups—that is, tell what brave deeds they had performed. These they enacted realistically, weapons often being given them to show how they had struck the fatal blows, etc.

I am assured by Sauk, Menomini, Ioway, and Sioux that they, and I believe most Indians, often refrained from scalping the bodies of men who had distinguished themselves by their bravery, even when they subsequently ate their hearts. Eating the heart of an enemy gave his courage to the man who slew him, and was thus a sort of back-handed compliment to the deceased.

Sioux Indians have told me that while Custer's men were largely scalped and mutilated, Custer was not, because, while he was cordially hated, he was admired for his fearlessness. I dislike to refer to this as a specific instance, however, as so much of the history of the Custer fight has been disputed.—ALANSON SKINNER.

THIS comrade, in a letter to Edgar Young, wants to know of any one who can give him data on a particular section of South America. He would seem to have collected quite a few data himself. Mr. Young, having covered part of that country himself, is willing to gamble that comrade Orth actually made the trip he says he made.

Palestine, Texas.

About the country in Ecuador, on eastern slope of Andes. I have made that trip over the railroad from Guayaquil to Quito by rail, then down on to the Napo River and down the Rio Napo to where it empties into the Amazon, then went back up the Amazon to Iquitos. In fact, on my trip last year I went up the Napo as far Pueoblo Napo. I was on the Napo looking at the placers.

MY TRIP last year took me in by way of Lima, Peru, up to Sero De Pasco; by rail from there down head waters of Rio Pachetea by a German place called Chuchuras. I spent almost a year in the country around on head waters of Rio Ucayali, Huallago, Marion, Rio Tigre and Napo.

The country between the Rio Huallago and Ucayali is the one that interested me most of all for several reasons, as I was shown many samples of placers, gold and platinum, and panned in places myself where I found some good showings. I also saw sample of pure native copper that weighed several hundred pounds. I also saw sample of quartz gold free milling in many places. Also saw sample from silver veins which must have run at least 50 to 70 ounce in silver with lots of native silver.

Here is one thing that very much interested me. I was told of a bronze ledge that the Indians told me ran into millions of tons. This place was only five minutes of river that a boat drawing seven feet of water year around can get into.

But you know as well as I do that there is no such mineral as bronze but the manufactured product. I told the Indians it was copper. But an Indian said it was not copper and he showed a piece of copper.

Also saw fossils from large prehistoric animals in different places on these rivers.

BUT the country that interested me most of all was the country lying between the Huallago and the Ucayali. This is the section where all this mineral is. This section is about 700 miles long and 50 miles wide in narrowest place and 300 in widest place. Has some of the largest and finest hot springs and mineral springs I ever saw in any part of the world.

There are several good-size mountain chains and have been told by Indians of large open plain or grass country. I was in at one place where I had glimpse of this grass land.

I made many trips into the foot of these mountain ranges in different places—trips that lasted from few days to 25. All afoot except where we went up small dead streams or trocges.

This would be a great place for trading-posts like the Hudson's Bay Co. has, as there are Indians in this section that never come in contact with the people on the rivers at all. The country, as I say, is rich in minerals of all kinds.

THE woods are full of medical plants, and trees that produce medical oil, nuts that make best kind of vegetable oil. Rubber of many kinds like the couche and heavy fena, shringra and the Balat which they are now gathering.

Then we have many different kinds of ivory nuts—that is, when it comes to shapes. I think I would be safe to say that, in sections I have been, at least a half million tons per year could be got.

Then we have the quinine bark. Vanilla. Besides hundreds of other things which could be had just by getting the Indians to gather it, as today it is not gathered for simple reason no one buys it or trades for it.

The rivers are full of the finest grade of pearl mussels. The shells are much larger than anything I ever saw in the States, but can't say as to whether they have pears or not.

Then there are the palms and different kinds of fibers which make a fine silky fiber. All these things can be had in commerical quantities.

This is only a few that I write of, as there are many hundreds of other things I know of, as I have spent many years in the tropics in different parts of the world.

The thing to do in this country I write of would be to put in a line of trading-stations on the different rivers and in the interior between the two rivers.

From what I saw, there must be at least 100,000 Indians in this section.

NOW, after all this writing, what I want to know is: Have you ever met or heard of any one that could give me any data on interior of this country between the Huallago and Ucayali?

Or do you know anything of it? If so, would be very much pleased to here from you.—BEN ORTH.

THE Lost Adams "mine." To answer all the letters of inquiry he has received from Camp-Fire comrades, M. M. Coleman gives here all the main facts, not already given to Camp-Fire, of his own knowledge and of his actual experiences in hunting the Adams diggings:

Portland, Oregon.

CAMP-FIRE: I have received so many requests for information and propositions concerning the Lost Adams diggings that I am taking this method of replying to the many who wish to investigate the story at first hand.

The account given by Mr. Robinson in Nov. 30 issue is the best I have ever read. I spent about three years in northwest New Mexico, principally looking for the mine, and Mr. R. omitted a few points that may or may not be authentic.

ACCORDING to the numerous prospectors I stopped with in that country the Adams diggin's are at the bottom of a very deep Malaphia cañon. All the formation above the gold is Malaphia, so you would have to be right at the diggin's before you would locate it.

Some of the numerous landmarks by which a person could follow the old trail used by the Adams party were the Little Door and Little Z Cañon. Just out of the Little Door the Adams party was supposed to have camped and at the top of the Little Z the provision expedition was said to have been killed by Indians.

So many have written me regarding the practicability of hunting this mine and, as some of them claim to be on slender financial resources, I can advise them better by giving my own personal experience.

IN 1918 went to N. W. New Mexico partly to punch cows and mostly to hunt the mine. Had $3,000, saddle and pack horse. Lots of snow that Winter. Made two starts Spring of '19 but finally got away in April. Had two prospectors with me; one knew Adams and the other had been partner of Shaw for ten years; I put up horse-feed and chuck; they put up experience. Found Little Door Cañon, Little Z, and, for the first time, a miniature of the Adams' mine in the natural Malaphia. Mine should be very close to miniature.

Found the old Indian village but didn't know where to go from there. Finally went to old Mt. Taylor and prospected back. Found the two peaks made famous by legend, but did not know where to go from there. Found an enormous ice-cave, but got so cold could not investigate it.

RAN out of supplies, returned to Springerville, Ariz. There I obtained two pamphlets written by Byerts of Socorro, N. M., giving not only the Adams version of the mine but numerous others. I sent one of these to A. S. H. and in some manner lost the other and was unable to buy more. If Mr. Davies can find one of these he will learn that a number beside Adams have been to the mine.

In summer of '20 made another prospecting trip and camped at a spring in the Malaphia formerly called Hole in the Wall. Again failed. Was broke by then, so went to finding gold the shortest route known, working for it. There are thousands of cañons in the Malaphia any one of which could contain the mine, but they all look alike and are hard to travel over if you can travel at all.

AS FOR this late expedition organized to hunt treasure buried by Spaniards. I took a hunt for that also while at Zuni Indian reservation in New Mexico. According to the legend in that country, when the Spanish priests were on their way to Mexico City with 20 burro-loads of bullion they were attacked by Indians about 80 miles N. W. of Magdalena, N. M. Seeing they would be overtaken, the priests threw all the gold into what is known as Sequio Springs. These springs are located on the south side of old Putney Mesa and are a series of springs, mud-holes and swamp covering about 25 acres. Seemingly they had no bottom. An old Mexican living close told me one of the burros got away from the priest and wandered off into the mountains. He found it after it had died with the pack on, and sold the bullion, buying the ranch where he then lived.

He further informed me that $5,000,000 in gold was somewhere in the bog and explained that if I would put up all expense and work for getting it out, he would guarantee I found it with his help. If it is in that bog or ever was, it is probably safe, as gold sinks, being heavy.

THE three men associated with me on those trips who might give a person additional information are John Jones of Aztec, N. M., Langford Johnson of Datil, N. M., and J. A. Putman of Spur, Texas.

Any one writing me for more information please enclose a stamped envelope and I will answer as many as possible, but can not think of anything not covered either in this or former articles to Camp-Fire.—M. M. COLEMAN, 890 Savier St., Portland, Oregon.

A LETTER from one of you to Harold Lamb of our writers' brigade, and Mr. Lamb's reply. Tobacco is the subject. Somewhere in our cache is a letter from Mr. Lamb which antedates both these, in which he set forth evidence of tobacco smoking among the Cossacks and Turks before 1650, but I can't lay hands on it.

Norfolk, Virginia.

Now in regard to tobacco. I took a trip to the public library and an Encyclopaedia Britannica to do so. What do you know about this? Research workers have found pipes in clay of the bronze age. The ancient Scythians, and no doubt the Ancient Irish, smoked them. There seems to be an idea that the priests or other privileged persons burned "aromatic herbs" in them and what else might that be but tobacco—or kinnikinnick—which might include willow-bark.

It seems smoking was an ancient art, and if it did go out of fashion until revived by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1568, thanks to Ralph Lane, first governor of Virginia and Sir Francis Drake who brought the starving colonists home to England—it was not altogether a lost art. Columbus found the Indians smoking when he landed in the new world—on his second voyage, anyway—1494-1496—but he did not make it clear, or rather, there is no record whether it was a priestly rite or a custom. Some of the scribes who wrote about his voyage seem to think that the Indians used tobacco as a slow-match and that smoking was learned by trying to keep the match alight. Which seems a right plausible reason and a most clever suggestion.

It is possible the Spaniards cultivated tobacco in Cuba and other islands in the West Indies and that they shipped home cargoes long before Jamestown went into the tobacco-export business. Some of the tobacco got to Lisbon, for the French Ambassador, Jean Nicot, sent some to Queen Marie de Medici of France, in 1588, if the records are correct. (Hence "nicotine.")

But isn't it quite possible that the Cossacks kept alive the ancient custom of smoking "aromatic herbs," which might include the tobacco plant, as well as barks just as their ancestors in the bronze age smoked?

To be sure, one authority says that tobacco is derived not from the Indian wood "tabac" or "tabacca," but from the name given a hollow wooden tube that forked at one end so that the forked ends could be placed in the nostrils and the other end over a pot, or dish, of burning aromatic herbs, which included the plant we know as tobacco. However, it is said that the Mexican Indians called the plant "tabacca."

MY FRIEND Jim King says that the Irish smoked pipes in the grand old days of the bronze age, and that they went adventuring down to Egypt and made friends with the Jews in Goshen. He swears it was the Irish among the Jews that stirred up the strike in the Egyptian brickyards and quotes Talbot Mundy to prove it. He says it was the Irish among the Jews that brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ireland and that it was the Irish family of Cusack that founded the Cossack race. Glory be! Seems to me *Mickey Free*, in "Charles O'Malley" said the same thing.—JAY LEWIS.

The other day I ran across an account of smoking in Russia early in the seventeenth century. The Tzar put a stop to it, I think in 1634, by slitting the nostrils of any one found with a pipe.

Curious, isn't it, that the wine taverns were then a state monopoly! It was quite a crime to fail to encourage a man to drink, or to tell him he'd had enough. So, in 1634 Russia barred out tobacco and encouraged booze, and in 1916 banned booze and collected a revenue from tobacco. *Sic transit*—

ANYWAY, I wonder how much of the general sottishness of most Russians in the last centuries was due to this government-inspired soaking up of spirits. A traveler in 1600 tells of meeting a man coming out of a Russian tavern clad only in a shirt. The tourist thought he had been robbed and condoled with him, until the native remarked that his trousers were in the tavern and his shirt might as well keep them company. The second time the man came out he wore "some flowers gathered at the inn door."

TO GET back to our tobacco, the possibility you mention of Spaniards bringing back tobacco from the new world long before the famous Sir Walter Raleigh is interesting. If they did, and the Barbary peoples learned the use of it and handed it on to Constantinople and the Turks, we could understand how it appeared in the Cossack country around 1600.

Putting prehistoric Irishmen aside, your remark about smoking being a known art before the American Indians were discovered is news to me. I think it can be verified quite easily.

Any one who knows the modern Chinese realizes that 'most anything can be smoked in a pipe. Hemp, for instance, shredded herbs, opium.

AND a pipe is not always necessary. Some of the tribes in the Himalayas enjoy their whiffs in this way; they make a tunnel in the earth—a small pit having two openings—kindle tobacco in it, and lie down on the ground, closing one hole with their hands and breathing in the smoke through the other. These chaps, as well as the Tatars and most Orientals "swallow" the smoke. They draw it into their lungs and hold it for minutes at a time.

Perhaps some other chap knows just what was smoked in Asia before 1610, when tobacco was just being exported from Virginia.

They must have had tobacco or a substitute then if smoking was so prevalent in Russia and Turkey that the Tzar and the Sultan both issued edicts against it in 1630 or thereabouts, on the ground that it started so many fires.

MY UNDERSTANDING is that tobacco was scarce even in England for a hundred years after that, and sold at boot-legging prices. Wasn't it James I who wrote the famous "Counterblast to Tobacco" and asserted that nobles were ruining themselves, spending two thousand pounds or more a year on the makin's?

Anyway, England's trade with Russia was only a mere trinkle, by way of the Baltic in 1630, and I do not remember any tobacco mentioned.

A GOOD story is told about the Sultan—I think it was Murad II or III—who prohibited smoking, under penalty of hanging an offender with a pipe through his nostrils—thereby going the Tzar one better.

It seems this particular Sultan had a trick of going around the streets of Constantinople in disguise, *à la* Haroun al Raschid. He would snoop around, followed by a bodyguard and have a bully time ordering any citizen whom he found breaking one of his dictums to be beheaded on the spot.

ONE night in the ferry, coming over from the Asia side, he encountered a janizary who was bound for the city on leave, holiday bent. The soldier was smoking a pipe, and clapped the sultan on the back casually.

Before landing, the janizary recognized Murad and realized that he was due to lose his head. Nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand Moslems out of a million would have resigned themselves to fate. This chap kept on talking to the Sultan until the boat moored. Then he clouted Murad behind the ear with his fist and disappeared in the streets before the horrified bodyguard could overtake him.

Later the Sultan saw the humor of the encounter and issued a statement that he forgave the janizary and wished to reward him for his readiness of wit. But the soldier never risked claiming the reward.

NOW here, it seems to me, is a discussion that deserves very much to be carried further. Many people believe they know how to ride a horse, but do they? For example, this comrade says only about one man in ten on the ranches he knows can ride so as to be easy on the horse.

Another point about horses has interested me a good while: Just what are the gain and the loss from breaking or conquering a horse by physical force aided by brains as opposed to the slower process of winning him to man's service by gentle means? I take it there can be no general answer either way, but just what are the merits of the case *pro* and *con?* Fewer favor the gentler method, so they will have to speak up if their side of the question is to be upheld.

Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In answer to query about how Westerners ride trotting horses, would tell of how they ride them in northwestern Nevada and northeastern California.

COMPARING British and our methods can't be done, because the saddles are different. In riding trotting horses in the lava strewn country, some use long stirrups, some short, but the result is the same because long stirrup riders ride on the ball of the foot (a practise more favored in southern California than northern); the short-stirrup riders ride with the feet "home," that is, feet into the stirrups until the heel almost touches the stirrup. In either case the stirrups are short enough so that the rider's crotch clears the saddle a good bit. No two use the same clearance; try until it suits you. Try three fingers clearance to start.

Don't sit in the saddle. The stirrup leathers are made double and 2½ to 3 inches wide to carry your weight. Put as much weight as possible on them; sit back against the cantle just enough to be steady, lean a bit forward to adjust your center of gravity so the stirrups take the weight.

"Put your weight on to the stirrups" holds good for any gait when using the Western type of saddle.

IF YOU ride on the ball of your foot (as I prefer) get stirrups with enough distance fore and aft so that the weight is distributed over all of the foot from the hind end of the ball to the best part of the toes. If you don't want to tire your feet, you need a foundation to stand on. Otherwise you will find yourself sitting down and making kidney sores on the poor cayuse.

Regardless of public opinion to the contrary, only about one man in ten (on the ranches I have been on) can ride so as to be easy on the horse.

No one can ride properly on a horse that is half asleep; always keep a horse awake when you are on him; wear spurs.

In learning anything, try all that sounds reasonable and use what fits you. A good rider is not a standardized product. Each one is a bit different.

"A saddle is a saddle" those that don't know will tell you. You can ride with some, with others you can't. A fit in a saddle is harder to get than a fit in shoes. Try different ones until you find one that fits. Then get one like it. To learn to keep your weight on stirrups is hard, but don't weaken. Learning is worth the glory.—BILL GIANELLA.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any member of Camp-Fire—and any one belongs to Camp-Fire who wishes to—may conduct a Camp-Fire Station and meet up with the men who are still hitting the trails of the world.

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FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage ten cents*).

11. Philippine Islands.
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached*)

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, P. O. Box 2882, Tampa, Fla. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
(Editor to be appointed.) Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport.

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, 67 Burlington Road Fulham, London, S.W. 6, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

26. Turkey and Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

27. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

28. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

29. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

30. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred F. Fleischer, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

32. Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

33. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

34. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

35. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

36. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

37. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St. Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

38. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

39. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

40. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

41. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. Robinson, 173 Maple Ave., Pembroke, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *Postage 3 cents.*)

42. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

43. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
Ed. L. Carson, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

44. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

45. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

46. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, Larkspur, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

47. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, care *Adventure.* Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

48. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

49. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

50. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

51. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached.*)

52. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and in habitants

53. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

58. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Allgehanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, care *Adventure*. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods of practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

I.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

J.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

London.

TO MY "A. A." READERS:

I have been asked to write to you; but it's hard to write a letter to hundreds of readers—a letter which is going to be printed. It puts one in mind of broadcasting—the only difference being that the person who "shouts into the microphone" isn't seen or any actual record kept of his efforts if they should happen to be rather on the "flat" side. Still I have been requested to make you suffer by introducing myself through the medium of a letter; so if you get terribly bored—I'm sorry.

I think I can safely be classified as being something of an "Adventurer"—or perhaps a "Rover" would be nearer the mark, because though I have had quite a lot of traveling in my twenty-nine years of existence I have never had any real hair-raising adventure except of course during the recent war—but then we all had more or less a taste of that "Big Adventure."

To revert to my younger days. I was born in a little village in Lancashire, England, called Torrisholme and claim the distinction (or misfortune) to have the name of the village as my middle Christian name. I don't think our respected parents ever stop to think when they are "dishing out" handles to our names that we have to struggle through life with whatever they thought was "sweet and pretty." Torrisholme to me sounds like a new brand of cigar or a name for a new suburban bungalow.

Well, after having gained sufficient strength to carry such a heavy name about with me, I left England at the age of three and next found myself in the home of "pork and beans"—Boston, U. S. A. In time I went to school to master the "three R's," and after having mastered them to the best of my ability, I set out in search of my first job. Fate or Fortune, I am not sure which, led me to a tea-broker's office, where I held the distinguished post of chief stamp-licker for many weeks. I then sought a more remunerative occupation and a less "sticky" one, and after many weeks of careful searching I found myself an assistant-assistant buyer in ladies' "frills and flouncings" in one of Boston's then biggest department stores—Filene & Co.

During all this time I always had a leaning toward the spotlights; and, having been born of a well-known theatrical family, I "leaned" too far one day and found myself together with my father playing on Broadway in one of our Scottish plays—"Bunty Pulls the Strings." After a successful run on the "Great White Way" we toured all over the States and Canada. On the termination of that tour I again went out with a first-time vaudeville sketch and did eleven weeks on the B. F. Keith Circuit, playing New York, Philadelphia Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Boston, etc. My father and I then returned to England for a holiday, intending to return to the "land of liberty" after a few weeks; but we just arrived home in time to hear the bugle sound the "fall in," and the next we knew we were both in khaki, marching off to play the part of soldiers on the field of reality and not on the stage. The war we all know about. I came back alone—lucky perhaps to be one of the fortunate ones; but I left one out there who made his last "exit."

I returned to England—joined in the vast throng of men who pushed and shoved one another in the vain effort to find employment. Luck came my way at last—I again found myself trying to amuse others behind grease paint and powder; but the profession—art—is lost since the advent of moving pictures, so I looked out for something better and eventually struck out and this time found myself in the Civil Service of the Sudan Government, for a time.

I must say that I have had many pleasant evenings out here in the vast country of desert, and blinding sandstorms, answering my readers' queries on my area. I have one big ambition left in life, and that is that I shall some day find myself once again in the "land of liberty" which I left for a holiday but haven't been able to return to.

Well, readers, I won't bore you further with my life history; but it has been full of Romance and Roaming Adventure. I hope that I shall have many letters asking for information on my area, which it gives me great pleasure in answering to the best of my ability.—W. T. MOFFAT.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Thanks for permitting me to sit closer to that ever-burning fire of friendship. For years I enjoyed sitting obscured in one of the outer circles listening to the tales of the wanderer. I enjoyed reading Camp-Fire talks because they were a sort of post-graduate course, and by listening I learned. And I enjoyed these talks because they breathed red-blooded Americanism.

Born and reared in Pittsburgh. When nine years old, was stricken with a disease of the hip bone (at that time sort of a mystery in the medical world). Lay in bed until sixteen years old. Consequently lost all the fun of the boy. Later worked in a mill, clerking, got a knowledge of steam engineering. Then the glare of the newspaper game.

For the last fourteen years been with the *Pittsburgh Post*, ten of them in the library and eight as river editor. The river game is the most interesting, and, believe me, I certainly devoted all my time to make good.

In this game I secured the friendship of Assistant U. S. Engineer W. D. Fairchild, known as the best builder of dams on inland rivers. This man surveyed the Missouri from the source to the mouth, walking every foot of it in three years. Told me he located monuments made by Lewis and Clark Expedition, and without the use of complicated instruments such as are used today, these marks were correct.

During my vacation I have worked for Uncle Sam on construction work and enjoyed every moment. On several occasions accompanied the District Engineer in his tour of inspection and only recently came down the Monongahela River from the source to its mouth. Am an honorary member of Local No. 30, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association and publicity director of the Allegheny River Improvement Association. Also married.—Geo. A. Zerr.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Trout-Fishing in Ontario

GO TO Algonquin Park:

Question:—"Having been south of the Madawaska district last year trout-fishing, we feel that you can advise us where we could get good fishing.

We might say that in September we were north of Maynooth and Bancroft looking for trout streams, and although we asked at the different places in that territory the only reply we got was that none of the streams in that vicinity of the country contained brook trout. Furthermore, we fished the York branch of the Madawaska, also Bird, Eagle and other streams which only resulted in a string of five brook trout.

We are brook-trout enthusiasts and have tried many streams in Ontario without much success; that is, only getting small trout.

The following are the questions we shall be glad to have you answer:

Where are the good trout streams in the Province of Ontario (outside of preserves) within access from Toronto by motor?

What roads are the best into the district?

Where can we buy or lease Government land of about fifty acres with fast water on it in which there are trout?

Are there streams of fast running water in the Madawaska district wherein a good catch of trout may be secured?"—Bartlam and Robb, Ontario, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—You have given me a poser; for like yourselves I am a brook-trout enthusiast, and I have gone far afield after them. I have been on the York branch and L'Amable Creek but had only fair success.

It is a pretty hard matter to answer you for the reason that the good creeks have been fished out, thanks to the motor car.

I presume you have a map of Renfrew County and the lower part of the district of Nipissing. If you have I can point out for you where I have secured trout within the past five years. As to what these streams are like today I can not make any promises. Leaving Eganville southwestward to Lake Clear, there were creeks on each side of the lake in which there were trout. I have had some very good catches in Constant Creek near by.

Climbing the mountain, Highland Creek and Highland Lake were good. Farther on there are several brook streams between the mountain and Quadville. At the Quadville dam on May 24, 1918, I got the second biggest trout ever caught in the county—so it is said.

Farther south along the north side of the Madawaska you might find a few trout in Black Donald Creek. And away up the Bonnechere River at the head of Round Lake there is another fairly good trout stream. Jumping a big stretch of country into the district of Nipissing, there was good fishing at the dam on the Little Opeongo River below Aylen Lake. But they tell me that the best fishing is up the Little Opeongo where it comes into this same lake. You would be in the Algonquin Park then and would have to have a permit.

Nearly all this country can be reached by motor car except Aylen Lake. You could leave your car at Barry's Bay and go up by rail. The lake is about two miles from the railway.

Nearer home there are trout preserves at Havelock, Brighton, etc.

Summing it all up, I would advise you to go to Algonquin Park, secure a permit and go to it. You might inquire from the Department of Forests and Mines if there is any place you could lease. I don't know any.

"Gipsy" Aviators

JUST now they're finding the pickings right slim:

Question:—"I would like to know the number of hours, solo flying, that are required to get a license to carry passengers in a Curtiss JN 4, also the cost of the license.

I would appreciate any information that you think would be of value to a man starting to carry passengers.

I am enclosing a stamped and addressed envelop for your reply."—John D. Moran, Langley Field, Hampton, Va.

Answer, by Lieut.-Col. Schauffler:—So far in this country there are no regulations which make it mandatory for a pilot to have so and so many hours "solo" before he is allowed to carry passengers. I wish there were, for there would be fewer accidents. From your own experience on a flying-field you can easily figure out how many hours a pilot would have to have under all conditions before you would care to go up with him.

I am enclosing a sample application blank for the National Aeronautic Association's pilot's certificate, which is the same as the old Aero Club of America license. This will give you all the information you desired along the line of cost, etc.

Ifyou can fly the test you get a license, no matter how many hours you have been flying. I heard of a case where a man had had only one hundred minutes' instruction and was able to fly it; but when he got in a tight place later on with a passenger he killed himself and the passenger too.

In regard to getting out of the Air Service to start carrying passengers on your own hook—don't do it. Take my advice and stay in the Air Service and get all the training possible. Take the examinations and go to the Cadet School and get your commission in the Air Service Officers' Reserve Corps. By that time this country may be alive and aeronautics will be booming; but things are dead now. There are a few companies operating, but they aren't making any money to speak of. There are a few "gipsy" pilots touring the country, but they are just barely making a living.

If you want to see for yourself what a darn hard time one has running his own "show," why go to it; but my advice is stay away from it until things are more settled and we have decent laws governing flying in the United States.

Take a run over to Boat Harbor, Newport News, some afternoon and see for yourself what a darn tough time —— is having there. It may look to you as if he were hauling in the money hand over fist; but just remember he doesn't fly every day in the year and that there are many, many days when he doesn't make a penny—and all the time there is "Old Man Overhead" eating his head off.

Good luck to you in whatever you do. I'd like to know what you decide to do, for I am always interested.

Cheerio!

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

The Nile Flood

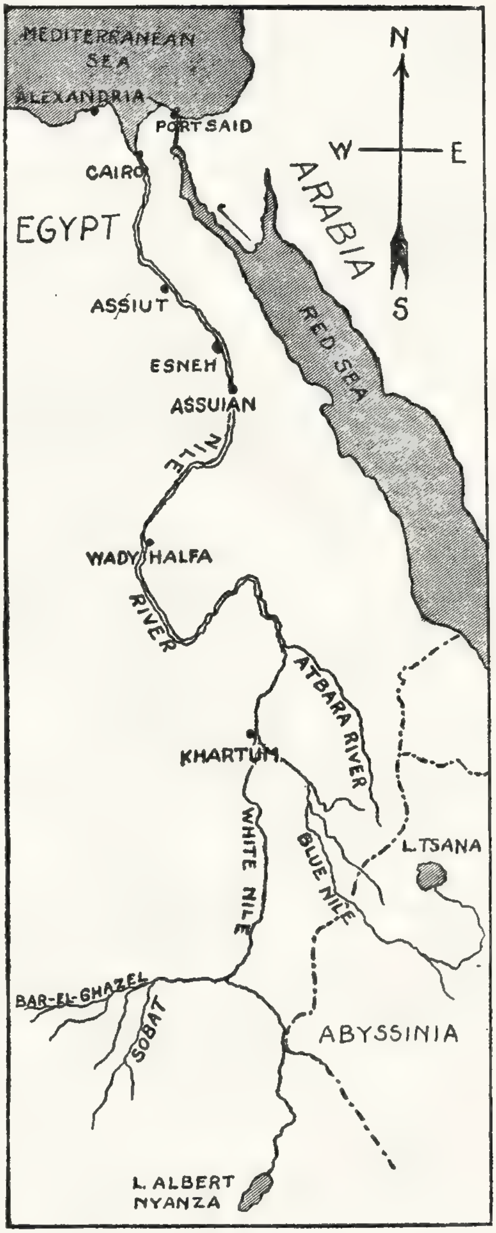
THE subjoined monograph, printed on hard paper, may be obtained without charge upon application to its author, Mr. W. T. Moffat, Sudan Customs, Khartoum. Be sure to enclose a self-addressed envelop and five cents in stamps, *not* attached:

The river Nile, with a total length of some 3,500 miles, receives no tributary below the Atbara, which enters it nearly 1,700 miles from its mouth, and the amount of rain it receives throughout that distance is negligible. Nevertheless its annual flood is of such volume as to raise its discharge into the sea from *nil* in the Summer months (when both mouths are entirely closed by earth dams) to 10,000 cubic meters per second at its greatest height, usually in September.

The course of the flood in a normal year is briefly as follows:

The *White Nile*, though furnishing almost all the water during the low stages, contributes only about one-twentieth of the whole volume of the flood, as the greater proportion of the water derived from the great lakes is wasted by evaporation in the equatorial swamps. In common with the Bahr-el-Zeraf and Bahr-el-Ghazal the rains cause its rise to commence about the end of May, though the latter river usually falls again and does not attain its true flood until July or August. The effects of the first true rise are felt at Wady Halfa about the middle of June. It continues to rise slowly, attaining its maximum at Halfa about the 3rd of September, after which it falls again very slowly, reaching its minimum about the 27th of May.

The *Blue Nile* commences to feel the effect of the rains on the Abyssinian plateau and to rise about the end of May, becoming navigable about the middle of June and bringing the red fertilizing flood down to Khartoum about the 20th of June, and to Halfa in the middle of July. The rise continues in an irregular manner until it attains its maximum discharge of 9,000 cubic meters per second at Khartoum about the 5th of September, at which time it is contributing a volume of water and fertilizing deposit enormously in excess of anything supplied from other sources. Later in September it falls off rapidly, until toward the end of December it becomes unnavigable and continues to fall until it attains its minimum discharge of 100 cubic meters per second about the 10th of May.



The *Atbara*, fed by the rains in the Abyssinian Mountains, commences to rise toward the end of May, the flood usually reaching the mouth almost in the form of a tidal wave early in June. It brings down a very large proportion of silt, and it attains its maximum discharge of 3,000 cubic meters per second about the 23rd of August at Khashm-el-Girba, after which it falls steadily and dries up into a series of pools.

The *Sobat* normally commences to rise toward the end of April by reason of the rainfall on the western slopes of the Abyssinian Mountains brought down by the *Baro*. The *Pibor* and its tributaries do not seem to rise until the middle of June, deriving their water chiefly from swamps. It is usually navigable to Gambeila by the end of May, though a sudden fall is always likely to occur until the middle of June. It attains its maximum about the 13th of November, and continues navigable until the end of December, when it again falls until its minimum is reached at the end of April.

The *Baro* from Gambeila to Nasser is unnavigable for steamers of 3 feet draft and over from October 15th to May 16th in average years.

The flood is partially controlled, as regards its distribution to Egypt, by the dam at Assuan and the barrages at Esna, Assuit and the apex of the Delta and Zifta.

Navigation is possible to almost all seasons, and without trans-shipment, from Alexandria to Wady Halfa; and again from Khartoum to Rejaf.—W. T. MOFFAT.

Game of Labrador, Baffinland, Ungava

IT SWARMS on land and sea:

Question:—"Will you kindly send me any information on Greenland and Ungava you have regarding big game and fur-bearing animals and best way to get there? I enclose return postage."—M. FRASER, Prince George, B. C., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—To get the best hunting in Greenland you'll have to go up north of Melville Bay and Cape York. Up along the coast above Cape York is a hunter's paradise. (Read my reply printed in *Adventure* for April 20th, 1923.) Walrus, whale, narwhal, seal, white bear, barren-ground caribou, musk ox, white wolf and white fox, blue fox, arctic hare, ermine, lemming, ptarmigan and all sorts of duck and sea fowl. I encountered none of the fur-bearing animals except those mentioned above, in northern Greenland.

In northern Labrador, however, you will find almost all the high-grade fur animals. I did not go into the interior around Ungava Bay; but on one trip north we put in at one of the little coast fishing-settlements, and a trapping-party came aboard to be taken on down to Sydney, C. B. They had been out one season, and the fur they had taken estimated around $3000. They had some of the finest otter pelts I ever saw. Some of these skins were so long that they reached the deck when held out in the hand of an average-sized man, and they were very dark and full-furred.

You can get almost all the different varieties of seal along the Hudson Strait shore, and the white bear as well. There are many bear along the floe ice around Cape Chidley in July. The walrus is a peculiar bird and is only found offshore from the mouths of the deep fiords as a general rule. They do not go far in any case from the clam-beds where they feed, and they collect in herds. They are not so numerous so far south as Hudson Strait, as they are in northern Greenland. In McCormick Sound they congregate in herds of 50 to 100 on a floe where they crawl to bask in the sun after filling up on clams.

There are big herds of caribou around the head of Frobisher Bay in the month of July. These herds live in the interior of Baffinland and come down to salt water in early Summer to calve and feed on kelp; they go back into the interior along in the middle of August, so that in September there are none to be found along the coast.

There are some few musk ox in the northern portion of Baffinland. I have not read the whole of McMillan's account of his trip into the interior of Baffinland, but what I tell you I got from my own trip up there in 1897.

A trip to northern Greenland would be very expensive unless you could obtain passage from some whaler. Scotch and Danish whalers work up in Davis Strait, and you could doubtless get them to give you passage and take your outfit also and land you where you could get into good territory above Cape York.

You can get a Danish steamer which makes Summer trips to Upernavik, but I can not tell you the cost of passage. From Upernavik you can go north in a small boat, which is perfectly practical if you watch your weather and the ice. A forty-foot (or even less) sailing-craft is O.K. The Eskimos often take much longer trips in their kyacks.

In this way the cost would not be prohibitive, whereas to charter a ship suitable (one of the Newfoundland sealing-fleet) would cost you for charter party and finding her with stores and crew somewhere in the neighborhood of $50,000.

To get into northern Labrador: There is a steamer which makes bi-weekly trips up as far as Nain, but I am not informed as to the fare. This steamer sails only during the Summer months, and I think goes from St. Johns, Newfoundland. You could have them take you up with your outfit and a sailing-boat, which could be taken on deck. It would not be much of a trick then to cruise up around Chidley and into Ungava during the Summer (August) when the ice was out of Hudson Strait.

Or you could go to Nain, Battle Harbor or Domino Run with your outfit, explore inland during the Summer and then get a sledge team and sledge your stuff in the sledging-season into your previously selected trap-line site.

I think you might get some detailed information from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa.

Canoeing, Chicago to St. Louis

A FINE fair-weather trip—but it's not always fair weather on these big Middle-Western streams:

Question:—"With one companion and possibly two I am planning on making a canoe trip from Chicago to St. Louis, Mo., and if it is possible up the Ohio to Louisville, Ky.

Is an eighteen-foot, lake-model canoe large and safe enough for this trip?

Are there any dangerous places on either the Illinois, Mississippi or the Ohio Rivers?

I heard that it is impossible for one to go up the Ohio River in a canoe. Is this so?

Do you think it would be all right if we carried only enough food for a few days at a time, and buy more as we need it?

About what is the distance by river to St. Louis and also to Louisville from Chicago?

I think I have gone out of your territory by asking about the Ohio and Illinois Rivers, but I hope you will be able to tell me what I want to know.

I enclose a stamped, addressed envelop."—ARTHUR H. SENGLAUB, Manitowoc, Wisc.

Answer, by Mr. Zerr:—Your lake-model canoe if in excellent—mind, I mean excellent—condition should weather the trip. Just heard from an old steamboat pilot of an accident on the Ohio River some time ago. Three young men, one a minister's son and two others, sons of attorneys of Buffalo, went down the Ohio in a canoe from Olean on the Allegheny. They went over a dike in a back channel, which on account of the low craft could not be seen until too late. And the Ohio is no creek when there is a storm, especially in the lower reaches.

In regard to dangerous places, it always is best to ask along the route in regard to riffles, bars, etc. Your third question as to whether it is impossible to go up the Ohio: Plenty of trips have been made, and no lake canoes either. But it is well to remember the first paragraph.

In regard to food your suggestion is about right. You'll find plenty of towns along the route.

As to distance, from LaSalle to the mouth is 224 miles; from the mouth of the Missouri River to the mouth of the Ohio River 199 miles, thence to Louisville, 366 miles.

Personally I think a good skiff or yawl is much safer than a canoe, which is only a shell. Why not attach a motor, which would make the trip easier?

Booksellers of Portuguese East Africa

NO charge for the ad, gentlemen:

Question:—"I am a reader of *Adventure* and learned through that magazine that you can give me information as to where I can get the leading newspapers of South Africa. I also want to get some good photos of the natives. Can you give me the addresses of places that sell such?"—CHAS. W. EVANS, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Can.

Answer, by Mr. Waring:—My section in "Ask *Adventure*" is that of Portuguese East Africa. For photographs and newspapers ot that country write to A. W. Bayly & Co., Booksellers, Lourenço Marques, Portuguese East Africa. This firm can very likely supply you with Natal, Rhodesian and Cape Colony newspapers and photos as well.

Trapping in Montana

A TOUGH game for the novice to make money at:

Question:—"Will you please furnish me with information in regard to trapping fur-bearing animals in northern Montana and the northern Rocky Mountains; also in regard to bear-hunting in the Spring and the species of bear found in those parts; also where I can get a book with the laws of this business in every detail? I am enclosing postage for your answer."—NOEL H. RYLEY, Everett, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—Perhaps as good a district as any in which to trap fur-bearing animals is in the northwestern part of Montana in Lincoln or Flathead Counties. The Montana law defines as fur-bearing animals marten, otter, fox, sable, muskrat, fisher. The open season on these animals is from November 1 to April 1. A special license of $1 is required to trap marten.

The law declares that predatory animals may be trapped or hunted at any time. These are coyote, wolf, wolverine, mountain lion, lynx, bob-cat and bear. Before a non-resident could trap or hunt in this State he would have to obtain from the Fish and Game Warden a non-resident hunting and fishing license, the cost of which is $30.

The bear are found in the Flathead and Lincoln County districts along the upper Yellowstone and the West Gallatin Rivers, these two last named districts being near the Yellowstone Park. There are a few grizzlies and silver-tips in Montana, but the black and the brown bear are much more plentiful. It is only once in a great while that the first two species are found.

If you write the Division of Publications, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for Farmer's Bulletin 1288 it will give you full information concerning the game laws of every State, of Federal game laws as well as those of Canada.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

KEPHART, STEVE, JOHN, PETER, and WASIL. (Brothers.) Any information will be appreciated by their sister.—Address ANNA KEPHART, 415 E. 73rd St., N. Y. C.

MALLON, DENNIS (Ohio Slim). Home was in Alliance, Ohio. Met him in Trinidad, Colo. Your old pal Shorty would like to hear from you.—Address WILLIAM BROWN, care of *Advenure.*

SPENCER, BERT. Write your old side-kick.—Address W. T. GOWAN, Box 341, Post, Texas.

REED, CLAUDE. If you are still alive and see this come home.—DAD and MOM.

STEVENSON, I. J. Children are fine. Please write to me.—ANNE STEVENSON, 10446 125th St., Richmond Hill, N. Y.

JOHNSON, WALTER and DURCY. (Cousins.) Last heard of in Fort Smith, Ark., in 1881. Probably went west to California. Natives of Petroleum Center, Pa. Any information will be appreciated by their cousin.—BENEDICT F. KINNA, Box 273, R.R.4, Houston, Texas.

BEDORTHA, HARRY F. Last heard of three years ago. Weight about two hundred pounds, black hair and wears glasses. Any information will be appreciated. —Address MRS. HARRY BEDORTHA, 4032 Agnes Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

RAHNER, WILLIAM. Born at Crown Point, Indiana. Age 67. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address ADOLPH RAHNER, 1643 N. Mango Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WILLIS, FRANK. Age about twenty-six. Dark complexion, black hair, tall and slim, brown eyes. Last heard of in New York in 1920. Any information will be appreciated.—Address EDWARD NEWTON, care of *Adventure*.

HADDEN, CHARLIE. Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. May have gone to sea. Any information will be appreciated.—Address H. S. LOVETT, 28 Ermine Road, Chester, Eng.

WOULD like to hear from any of the boys formerly of Battery A, 2nd U. S. Field Artillery who was with me in the Philippines, also any of the boys from Battery A, Fourth Field Artillery and of Battery D, Fifth Field Artillery A.E.F.—Address W. T. GOWAN, Box 341, Post, Texas.

SCANLON, OLIVER J. Last heard of in Goldfield, Nevada and San Francisco, Sept. 1909. His address at that time was Box 1759, Goldfield, Nevada. Was expecting to leave for Central Mexico with a contractor who was building a stamp mill in that region. His home for a time was Butte, Montana. Any information will be appreciated by his mother and sister.—Address MRS. GERTRUDE SULLIVAN, 422 James St., Seattle, Wash.

WOOD, ELMER. Last heard from in 1920 in New York City. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address GEORGE, care of *Adventure*.

DRINKARD, EMARY P. Last heard of was in Indianapolis, Ind., in 1917. Write me and get deeds of your property.—Address J. DRINKARD, U. S. S. *Black Hawk*, Manila, P. I.

ADREON, LLOYD. Please return. Let me know where and how you are. H. and V. also worried, also M's wife and baby.—Address MOTHER, care of *Adventure*.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

AUGUST, J. E.; Boulton, Gay A.; Caples, Albert; Collin, J. P.; Hawkins, M. B.; Harman, Richard A.; Russell, Robert L.; Tobin, Kathryn.

THE following have been inquired for in either the April 10, or April 30, 1924, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALBERT, Helen C.; Applegate, William F.; Buckley, Jim; "Coffeebeans," William; Cuddeback, Lavina G.; De Foe, Clarence; Love, Harry; Martin, Henry and Emma; Meyers, S. J.; McDonald, Mrs. Anna; McNally, A. B.; Sorrel, Robert; White, Chester Allen.

MISCELLANEOUS—Burke; F. P. H.; Wanted to hear from any one who went to France in Third Detachment of labor foremen.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MAY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **serial** and **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

MAREA'S FANCY MAN *Bill Adams*
He was a sailor, and on the hunt for a certain man to kill.

FRIJOLES FOR BREAKFAST *Thomas Topham*
No wonder he was a revolutionary.

RIFLE RULE A Five-Part Story Conclusion *Hugh Pendexter*
The sheriff shows his hand.

SCARS OF GOLD *Wilbur Watkins*
Old Joe was left to guard the mine.

THE POWER OF THE EAGLE ***An Indian Legend*** *Alanson Skinner*
How *Scalp-Lock* got his name.

CERTAIN EXILED GENTLEFOLK ***An Article*** *Wolcott LeCléar Beard*
Their former home was southern Asia; their present home is in the heart of tropical America.

Still Farther Ahead

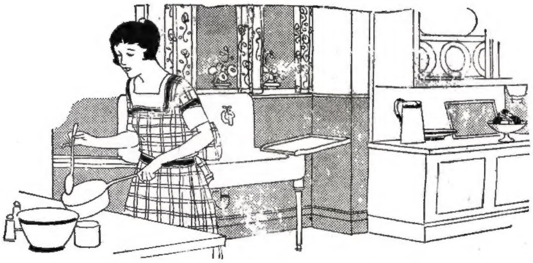
IN THE three issues following the next there will be *long* stories by Gordon Young, W. C. Tuttle, H. C. Bailey, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Leonard H. Nason, J. D. Newsom, Barry Scobee, T. S. Stribling; and short stories by John Webb, Clyde B. Hough, Georges Surdez, William Byron Mowery, John Scarry, Negley Farson, Bill Adams, Captain Dingle, Frank Robertson, Herman Petersen, F. St. Mars and others—stories of pearl-hunters in the South Seas, cowboys on the range, knights-at-arms in medieval France, doughboys in the Philippines, hard-case skippers on the Western Ocean, prospectors in Borneo, peltry-hunters in the snow country, artillery sergeants on the Western Front, bucko mates on windjammers, city gunmen on the Australian desert, bandits on the Border, asphalt-diggers in Trinidad, adventurers the world around.

Keep a Kodak story of the children

Autographic Kodaks *$6.50* up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

What do you really think of your wife's pie-crust?



A GOOD pie-crust covers a multitude of domestic sins. If a woman gives a man good pie and good coffee he will soon tell the world she is a good cook. Good pastry isn't hard to make, but she must know—not experiment; measure—not guess.

It's all so easy— this business of cooking—with The New Butterick Cook Book, simple as a primer, complete as an encyclopedia.

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Charles Faissole, maître d'hôtel of the Ambassador Hotel, New York, shows you with pictures the correct way to carve a turkey. In The New Butterick Cook Book you are also told how to carve roasts, fish, steaks, legs, saddles and even roast pig.

Are Any of Your Children Under Weight?

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This cook book has been revised and enlarged by Flora Rose, co-head of the Cornell School of Home Economics, assisted by members of her faculty and with the cooperation of Martha Van Rensselaer, head of the Cornell School of Home Economics.

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Please send me a copy of The New Butterick Cook Book for which I will pay the postman $2.65 ($2.50 for the book—15c for postage) when it is delivered to me. My understanding is that I may return this book after 5 days and have my money refunded if I am not fully satisfied.

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